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PLAYGOER'S PILGRIMAGE

POST-WAR THEATRE

THE STORY OF PANTOMIME

HALF A CENTURY OF ENTERTAINMENT

ETC. ETC.,

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HENRY IRVING in *Dante*, his last new production, Drury Lane, 1903.

Edwardian Theatre

by

A. E. WILSON



London

ARTHUR BARKER LTD.

First published in Great Britain in 1951

To

H. B. HAMPTON, WINIFRED NATHAN AND JOHN PARKER,

dear friends who remember these days

The author wishes to express his grateful thanks to the several kind friends who have supplied him with useful material for his book, particularly Mr. H. B. Hampton and Miss H. M. K. Nield. His thanks are due also to Mr. John Parker, Editor of *Who's Who in the Theatre*, for reading the proofs.

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I

THE EDWARDIAN SCENE

WHEN THE EDWARDIAN PERIOD BEGAN IN FEBRUARY 1901, I was already an ardent playgoer. Reach not for *Who's Who*, inquisitive reader. There was probably no playgoer poorer than I, and few who were younger. I was a small schoolboy who, if not taken to the play by indulgent parents, could afford sixpence for a gallery seat now and again out of half a crown a week pocket money, supplemented at times by tips from kindly uncles. It says much for conditions in those far-off days that one could be a playgoer on such a limited income, and that while living in a seaside town less than a hundred miles from London.

But so it was. England was then well covered by touring companies, and it was possible during the summer season to see all the latest plays from London, excellently performed, from St. James's comedies and Drury Lane melodrama to Gaiety productions, and to enjoy the performances of such West End stars as Ellen Terry, Charles Wyndham, John Hare, Charles Warner, Fred Terry and Julia Neilson, and Martin Harvey, quite frequently. I saw them all and many more, and even had the thrill now and then of viewing some productions before they reached the West End. It was a popular town for try-outs.

That was only one of the many theatrical advantages of living in Edwardian times. With other advantages I am not concerned, for this is a book wholly and solely about the Edwardian theatre.

I suppose the real historian, intent upon setting down an accurate picture of the times, should survey the past in a critical but strictly objective spirit and not let personal feeling unduly colour or distort his record. Excellent advice, no doubt, but much easier to give than to follow. Sentimental regrets and fond memories will persist in intruding; events and personalities are apt to be enlarged beyond their real magnitude, and momentous affairs completely forgotten. A kindly haze obscures faults and deficiencies and leaves only the bolder virtues in sharp relief. And memory is such a capricious and unreliable faculty. How can we trust in it when we are conscious of the fact that is so apt to be coloured by our own emotions, tastes and prejudices?

To be aware of this quite natural human failing is nearly sufficient to paralyse all but the most reckless and self-opinionated writer, and that I cannot claim to be. But I can at least claim that I am sufficiently sensible to be checked in my impulses by warning example.

Not long ago I came upon an article in an old volume of the *National Review* in which Charles Brookfield, at one time the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays, declared that the period between 1865 and 1885 (in other words the period of his youth) was "our theatrical Golden Age".

A more extraordinary and absurd statement was surely never made by any writer upon stage matters. Brookfield, a man-of-the-world if there ever was one, a man of the theatre, too, and undeniably a man of education and intelligence, could make that fatuous assertion at a period when so many notable actors occupied the stage, when not only Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones, Sutro and R. C. Carton had long been turning out plays, but such others as Bernard Shaw, John Galsworthy, Granville-Barker, J. M. Barrie and Somerset Maugham had firmly made their mark. As he was the official Stage Censor the work of these writers must have come under his notice; as a playgoer he must have been aware of the accomplishments of a multitude of talented players. Yet he could ignore contemporary achievements in favour of the past. His admiration was reserved for a period which, rich enough in its stage artistes, was absolutely poverty stricken in the matter of playwrights. Was ever man so self-deceived? Still, who knows how much sentiment coloured Brookfield's estimate and how much his judgment was distorted by considerations other than those of artistic standards? I can laugh at his statement—but I can understand his case.

My point is that this kind of Awful Example makes all but the most egotistical and daring writer feel hesitant and timid about expressing any large generalisation. No man willingly exposes himself to the danger of writing himself down an ass. In face of such a ridiculous statement as that to which Brookfield committed himself, it is difficult to make any kind of dogmatic assertion. Heaven forbid that, fully aware of the danger, I should make myself ridiculous by some similarly monstrous misjudgment.

Now it is difficult to escape from the peculiar glamour that the very mention of the word Edwardian evokes. The more that time widens the distance separating us from the period, the more glittering

does it appear to have been—a happy interlude of peace and prosperity in a mainly untroubled world, the last phase of a now vanished ease and luxury.

The long Victorian age, with all its great material achievements—clouded at the end by the Boer War and the growing suspicion that perhaps it was not entirely to our credit—was behind us, but, beyond doubt, we entered the new century with the comforting thought that we were at the beginning of a new age of peace, prosperity and progress.

Superficially there was everything to encourage the feeling. London was a very cheerful place in which to live in those far-off days. One thinks of it now as a city bright, gay and burnished and handsome in a solidly substantial way. The top hat and the jingling hansom formed its symbol. Well-filled shops, bright lights, the rich aroma of cigars, the perfume of floridly bedecked beauty. Piccadilly with its leisured idlers. Burlington Arcade and Bond Street with their stores of useless and expensive knick-knacks and fripperies. The fashionable, leisurely pageantry of Rotten Row. The curving grace of the older Regent Street, filled with ambling horse-buses and free from the reek of petrol. The crowds to which variegated military uniforms gave a touch of colour and picturesqueness. The swaggering scarlet-coated guardsmen with their pill-box hats. The theatrical posters of pictorial allure. The densely thronged Strand. Leicester Square, the teeming centre of the pleasure world, spangled at night with the lights of the minareted Alhambra, the sedater Empire and Daly's Theatre. Here was a nightly carnival of gleaming shirt-fronts, of fashion and beauty, with its special suggestion of veiled naughtiness.

Yes, there was glamour indeed.

It is this particular aspect of London life (if you were young and impressionable at the time) that you now vividly remember, not the fact that it formed only the deceptive, iridescent, thin veneer that covered but a small section of the Edwardian scene.

But it was symbolic of the period. The popular Edward was on the throne; all was right with the world. He, too, was a symbol of the period, the genial, portly, bearded, pleasure-loving Francophil, cigar-smoking and sport-addicted King. He mirrored the easy-going taste of the time and was the admired pattern of many. In the official biography Sir Sidney Lee, writing of the King as, before his accession, "a great patron of the theatre", says: "He did not care much for classical tragedies or Shakespeare, preferring opera,

musical comedy and, above all, modern society pieces containing plenty of subtle and caustic psychology; though when Lady Troubridge once asked him what was his favourite play he answered, after a pause, 'A difficult question—I think the play that impressed me most was *The Corsican Brothers*'."

Such might have been written about the prevailing tastes and judgments of a vast number of playgoers of the period. In that way King Edward was the average man. Add to the royal likes and dislikes the popular taste for melodrama and you have a fair picture of what the Edwardian theatre provided for the public.

Does it seem rather trivial and superficial to the modern playgoer? Probably, though before any such judgment is passed opportunity should be given for filling in the details of the picture.

I may as well confess that this is not an entirely unbiassed record. I find much to admire about the theatrical state of affairs of the Edwardian epoch. I do not think that everything that has happened since then has been for the better. I regret many things that have occurred. I deplore the disappearance of much that was to my taste. I wish that we still had with us many of those who once gave us such pleasure in the theatre. I continue to believe that they have not been replaced and that it is unlikely they ever will be.

I do not believe that a drama consisting entirely of Shakespeare, Shaw and Ibsen would be satisfying. I do not think that to-day there is any dramatist who compares with his contemporaries as did Pinero with those of his period.

I must confess that I am considerably affected by nostalgic sentiment and by the memory of the undeniable glamour of the time in which, enthralled by the theatre and with the art of the actor, I grew up. I suppose boyish impressions of the theatre are of little value and will hardly be accepted as evidence, but with ample authority behind me I think bold assertion is justified. So away with hesitancy. Let me declare that if the Edwardian period did not represent the Golden Age of our theatre it was not only the most exciting decade of the present century but one of the most interesting, momentous and important in the history of the British theatre.

That staid and sober-minded critic, William Archer, always well considered his statements and was too cautious and conscientious to make wild and exaggerated pronouncements. One always thinks of him—and I have had some personal acquaintance of his

extreme reserve and caution—as pondering very carefully over every sentence he wrote lest he should too hastily commit himself to wild and extravagant claims. Yet in *The Old Drama and the New*, published in 1924, he contended that the age that began with Pinero and ended with Coward—thus taking in completely the Edwardian period—would be judged by posterity to be greater than the Elizabethan. That may read like something of an overstatement, but now that the period can be looked upon in its proper perspective I see no reason to quarrel with his opinion, bold as it may seem.

In his book, Archer wrote: “It was not until the beginning of the new century that the English drama reached its full intellectual stature. The years between the death of Queen Victoria and the cataclysm of 1914 (I take the liberty of interpolating that during the war hardly anything of importance was contributed to the stage) witnessed a quite amazing outburst of dramatic activity. Sir Arthur Pinero did his best and ripest work; Bernard Shaw became the most famous dramatist in Europe; John Galsworthy proved himself as great a master of the stage as of the novel; Granville-Barker, though mainly occupied with producing the work of others, found time to add three great plays of his own to our dramatic literature;¹ the Irish Theatre brought to the front many writers of talent and one of rare genius in the person of J. M. Synge, and wherever a repertory theatre was established in the provinces it led to the discovery of local talent, perhaps not quite of the first order but such as, twenty years earlier, would have seemed almost marvellous. . . . It may fairly be said, I think, that since the beginning of the century, a greater number and a greater variety of plays have been produced in the English language than in any other.”

That estimate, generous as it may read, lends itself to very little qualification as far as I can see. On the contrary it can be amplified, for Archer made no reference to the distinguished work of Barrie whose best plays—with the exception, perhaps, of *Dear Brutus* (1917) and *Mary Rose* (1920)—were all written within the Edwardian period, nor with the considerable output of that then rising young playwright Somerset Maugham, nor with what many lesser writers contributed.

In his book, Archer was concerned only with the dramatic literature of the period and not with actors and the state of acting

¹ i.e. *Waste*, *The Voyage Inheritance* and *The Madras House*.

and other factors which should be taken into account in estimating the importance and interest of the Edwardian theatre.

Such "dramatic literature" as Archer appraised was not written for the study. Much of it, designed to suit the needs of the actor-manager and the star system and to supply the requirements and personalities of leading actors and actresses, was meant to be *acted* and not to be pored over in the library; and without the possibilities provided by the interpretative artiste it would have been unknown, if written at all. It was the actor who gave the inspiration and impetus to the author and, therefore, what the actors provided cannot be left out in appraising the media in which they appeared.

The Edwardian period was exceptionally distinguished in its acting—and by that I *mean* acting. Much of it, no doubt, was what we might now consider unduly robust, flamboyant, mannered, even stagey, for there is so much nowadays of restraint and reserve, induced by the cult of the "naturalistic" play, that when an actor is inclined to let himself go, to put power and feeling and emotion into his acting, to speak his words with a relish and to enforce them with a freedom of gesture and with the subtle effects of intonation and expression, the modern critic, unused to this form of stage behaviour, is inclined to describe the effect as "hammy". But what once prevailed certainly gave the illusion of life, and you were kept unaware of the means that produced the effect. It was something larger than life, an exaggeration of expression in depicting passions and emotions, but the actor's art concealed the machinery, and you were conscious only of the most convincing illusion of naturalness and reality. Was this how real people would speak and behave and deport themselves in such circumstances in real life? Of course it was. Only rarely did any doubt assail the mind. There was a style, a finish, a polish about this acting which somehow has since become rare upon the stage, largely, I suppose, because the artificiality of the society or drawing-room comedy and the picturesqueness and flourish of romantic drama, both so popular throughout the Edwardian period, have given place to a less restricted—but more restricting—field of subjects, and one in which, whether in comedy or drama, realistic treatment was adopted.

Dramatists surveyed a world which was socially limited. The peerage was greatly in vogue. Dukes and duchesses commonly adorned the scene, as did butlers, and in the plays of Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones, Sutro, Carton, Haddon Chambers and others, titles

abounded. Even that sturdy and enthusiastic herald of the "advanced" theatre and of the admittedly more progressive continental drama, that unsubduable pioneer of Ibsenism, J. T. Grein, could wince at a breach of the accepted convention. He expressed surprise and something only a little less than dismay when, reviewing *Smith*, one of Somerset Maugham's early comedies (1910), he described it as "in many ways the best of his plays *although the fact that his central figure is a servant somewhat lowers the standard of its comedy*". (The italics are mine.)

Clerks and greengrocers, artists and landladies could figure in farce, perhaps, and even humbler folk would provide the "comic relief" in melodrama. But, except for such minor characters as domestic servants, they were generally impermissible in drawing-room comedy. A snobbish view, perhaps, snobbish of the playwright as of the actor-manager, but snobbish also of the playgoer, whether from Mayfair or Muswell Hill, who preferred things that way. Snobbishness, or so it seems to us now, prevailed in those days among the educated and semi-educated public. The City clerk, the ill-paid shop-assistant, clung to their top hats and starched cuffs—or at least their employers compelled them to, and though they might have bettered their lot by joining a trade union, they would have scorned to lose respectability by so doing. Humble suburbanites tried desperately to keep up appearances by keeping a "slavey". Only the most reckless and defiant of clerks would have smoked a pipe in the street. No woman with the slightest regard for respectability would have powdered her nose in bus or teashop. Such things were not done.

Oh yes, it was an era of snobbishness, and what wonder that this outlook was reflected in the drama?

Writing during this period upon the German drama and contrasting its scope with that of the London stage, William Archer had this to say:

"It is impossible to explain away the fact that while German playwrights pass and repass freely from high life to middle-class life and low life, the English playwright concerns himself exclusively with the manners and emotions of the idle rich. The life of the doctor, the lawyer, the schoolmaster, the journalist, the clergyman, the merchant, the clerk, the tradesman, the peasant, is no less seriously studied on the German stage than the life of the baron, the millionaire or the guardsman. In England we are vouchsafed an occasional glimpse of a doctor or lawyer feeling the pulse or

making the will of Lord Adolphus or Lady Arabella ; when the lawyer has become a judge or a wealthy K.C. he may even be allowed to play a leading part in a drama of fashionable life ; but a play of legal or of medical life, as such, comes not within the scope of our playwrights' imagination. . . .

"For our dramatists' narrowness of outlook at least nine and sixty reasons have been given 'and every single one of them is right'. I propose to suggest a seventieth reason. It is to be found, I think, in the extreme centralisation of our theatrical life. The moment a man enters upon a career as a playwright he inevitably settles in London ; and London has none of that local self-consciousness which is the very mainspring of so many French, German and Scandinavian dramas. Less in London than anywhere else is the individual life apt to come into conflict with the social machinery and when such conflict does arise, it is generally in 'Society' narrowly so-called which is practically a small city within a great city."

Archer's remedy for this state of affairs, by the way, was to banish half a dozen leading dramatists to as many provincial cities for ten years, an interesting experiment which, as far as I know, has never been carried out.

In depicting the modes and manners of a curiously limited section of society that provided the playwrights with their material, a certain style and polish were called for, just as they were expected in "costume comedy", and as for romantic comedy and the cloak-and-sword drama of which there was plenty, flamboyancy and panache were required. And how splendidly the leading actors, principal stars, yes, and the rank and file of the profession, provided it, too.

You have only to mention the word Edwardian to any old playgoer to release a flood of delightful memories. I have tested myself in this way. Without premeditation or giving myself time for considered thought I try here to transcribe a few of the impressions of the time just as they rush to my mind. I have purposely made no attempt to discriminate or to arrange them in any order. I set them down just as they chaotically occur to me :

The ring of Lewis Waller's voice, and the proud flash of his glance.

The slightly nasal but pleasant quality of George Alexander's speech, and the superb set of his trousers.

The ascetic, classic profile of Frank Benson which might have been taken direct from any Roman coin.

The choice variety of whiskerage in which Holman Clark would appear.

The commanding and stately beauty of Julia Neilson, Evelyn Millard, Violet Vanbrugh, Constance Collier and Margaret Halstan.

The bland, sleek charm of Charles Hawtrey, lying himself in and out of trouble with the unruffled air of complete innocence.

The clear ringing tones of Irene Vanbrugh, her constant buoyancy and sparkle.

The effortless way in which Beerbohm Tree always detached interest from any other figure when he was on the stage.

The beauty and illusion created by Conrad Tritschler's scenery in Robert Courtneidge's productions.

The surprise of the contrast in seeing Ellen Terry, first as a dancingly joyous Beatrice and then, a few hours later, as a lorn, drab, moping creature in *The Good Hope*.

The easy-going, sauntering air, casual but commanding, of Gerald du Maurier who wore, most naturally, tweed sports jackets that would have made any other actor look like a scarecrow.

The ramrod military stiffness which Dawson Millward conferred upon every part.

The breezy eagerness and effervescence of Seymour Hicks who always seemed to have intruded mischievously into the play.

The lisp, the tousled fringe, the idiotic stare, the endearing humour, of Edmund Payne, which blended as well with the cosy Cockneyism of Connie Ediss as with the elegance of George Grossmith.

The floating, willowy grace and good nature of Gertie Millar.

The spirit of pure joyousness, the thistledown lightness, the spontaneity of expression which Adeline Genée brought to the ballet.

The *élan* and rousing vigour with which the Palace Theatre orchestra played overtures and incidental music under Herman Finck.

The inimitable chuckle and the eternal boyishness of Cyril Maude.

The good looks of H. B. Irving, of Dennis Eadie, of Allen Aynesworth.

The suggestion of pure, disembodied spirit in Florence Smithson's singing.

The more-than-duchess-like dignity and carriage of Ellis Jeffreys.

But that is enough. The flood of such brief impressions must be restrained for the catalogue of delightful memories is likely to make me lose my way.

All that I have written so far no doubt sounds like eulogy. Well, let me admit it. I have already disclosed my partiality. Try as I may to present an uncoloured picture I cannot prevent it developing in that way. Without that sneaking regard for the past I doubt if I could have been induced to attempt a book upon this subject. If I am wrong in some of my preferences I have no doubt that what I have to say will interest older playgoers who remember the times and will arouse sympathetic chords in their breasts.

What is of general interest, however, to the modern student of the stage, is that the period was one of intense activity, of progress, of revolutionary changes and of transition.

Playgoers continued to enjoy the drawing-room comedies in which George Alexander and Charles Wyndham appeared, the romantic exploits to which Lewis Waller and Fred Terry devoted themselves, the lavish and picturesque productions in which Tree figured, the farces and frivolities in which James Welch, Weedon Grossmith, Charles Hawtrey and many of similar stamp figured, the Drury Lane autumn melodramas of customary sensation and device and the nonsensical gaieties and ear-tickling melodies of musical comedy.

It was the actor-manager, the star, who chiefly drew the audience, rather than the play. Playwrights, of course, had their following and many of them were certain "draws". But they wrote round their players and designed for them parts in which to exhibit their familiar and admired characteristics. The general demand would be not "Who wrote the play?" but "Who is in it?" And if the answer was "Alexander" or "Tree" or "Waller", the playgoer knew very much the kind of play he might expect.

But all the while ideas were fermenting and underground forces were at work, subtly but surely undermining the structure of the

existing theatre, soon to produce remarkable changes, soon to make it evident that the theatre was being transformed into a place in which the actor was no longer the predominant figure, but one in which the playwright and the play were something of more than equal importance.

The new generation was knocking at the door and was beginning to stir in revolt against prevailing conventions. The influence of Ibsen was being felt and the advanced intellectual few, led by such pioneers as Bernard Shaw, J. T. Grein and William Archer (who had translated Ibsen's plays), had begun to show that the theatre was the place for the discussion of new ideas and philosophies, that there was need for plays dealing with real and urgent problems, with real people and with real emotions. It was not sufficient in their view that the theatre should exist only as a place of mere entertainment; it should be used as a platform for discussion, for the ventilation of new ideas. And they considered that the playgoer was not only a person whom it was necessary to entertain with artificiality, demanding nothing of him but acceptance and the capacity to be amused, but that he should be induced to bring mind and intelligence into the theatre—in short, that he should be induced to think.

That was the revolution which, beginning when Edward VII came to the throne, made its full effect felt before his reign was over. No change so complete had been accomplished in the theatre during the entire Victorian era. This fact alone is sufficient to make the Edwardian theatre unique.

And now I must warn the reader that I am likely at any time to wander and digress. In a ramble through a pleasant wood one does not take an orderly, methodical course. One is diverted here and there by some attractive path. One pauses now and again or returns to some spot to renew delight. That should be sufficient excuse. At least it is the only one I offer.

II

THEATRELAND AS IT WAS

TIME HAS MADE SOME CHANGES ON THE THEATRICAL MAP OF London since the new century began ; old and once popular theatres, many of them linked with illustrious names and historic stage events, have been swept away and new theatres have been added, but the general aspect of most of the older houses was very much as it is to-day.

I expect that any *revenant* playgoer, returning to the scene of his former days would indeed be surprised to find what little change there is in the outward aspect of many of his once familiar resorts. That circle which embraces what (in defiance of topographical accuracy) is known as West End Theatreland, extended somewhat farther east fifty years ago. Entering it eastwards from the Strand the visitor in 1901 would first have come upon the old Strand Theatre, long associated with farce and burlesque and made famous in its closing days by the long run (1,075 performances) of *A Chinese Honeymoon* in which little Louie Freear, a female Dan Leno, abounded in her comic excellence. It stood on the south side of a narrower Strand on the site now occupied by the Aldwych tube station. It was a cosy but inconvenient house and its drains were held in ill repute, a fact which no doubt helped towards its destruction.

On the other side, on the site now occupied by Bush House, were to be seen the last remains of the Globe Theatre, the Opera Comique and the Olympic, all ramshackle buildings but identified in their day with many notable successes—the first with *The Gay Lord Quex* (1899), the second with early Gilbert and Sullivan. The present Strand Theatre and the Aldwych (which sprang up when a vast site was involved in the clearance of much ancient property in a congested area of old and narrow by-ways to make way for the construction of Aldwych and Kingsway) were yet to be built. Drury Lane Theatre, with its solid portico and colonnade, looked very much as it does to-day and so did Covent Garden Opera House and the Lyceum which was Henry Irving's home.

The old Gaiety where John Hollingshead's "sacred lamp of burlesque" had been extinguished in favour of the brighter light of George Edwardes's musical comedy, and very soon was to make

way for its more imposing successor, stood a little farther to the west, and nearly opposite, situated at the corner of an awkward bottleneck, was the little Terry's Theatre, which Edward Terry had built from the profits made out of Pinero's early farces.

Farther west were the Savoy and the Tivoli music-hall where now stands the cinema. The Vaudeville and the Adelphi—both since reconstructed—were there. St. Martin's Lane had its Duke of York's Theatre but no New Theatre and no Coliseum and the now theatreless Leicester Square, which with Piccadilly constituted the theatrical hub of the universe, was gay at night because Daly's Theatre, home of operetta and musical comedy, was at one corner of the square which was dominated by the Empire and the old oriental-looking Alhambra, both homes of ballet and of "international" variety.

Eastwards, in Charing Cross Road, were the Garrick and Wyndham's. Piccadilly had the London Pavilion, then a popular music-hall, and the subterranean Criterion where Wyndham reigned, and in Shaftesbury Avenue were the Lyric, the Apollo, the Shaftesbury and the Palace, then a centre of "international" variety.

Near the corner of Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road stood the Oxford, destined to be rebuilt and to have a too brief spell as a theatre before its disappearance in favour of a vast tea-shop. No great distance away was the Great Queen Street Theatre, later renamed the Kingsway. Before one came to Oxford Circus there was the old Princess's Theatre, famous for melodrama and pantomime. It was a large, old-fashioned house which ended its long history early in King Edward's reign but, with its frontage boarded up and its back entrances still decked with tattered bills and with ancient wire-globed gas jets, was destined to remain for many years as a gloomy, murky reminder of former fame.

In the Haymarket the Theatre Royal—but who, since Victoria's days had ever referred to it as such?—faced the recently opened Her (later His) Majesty's which Beerbohm Tree had been able to build at considerable expense because of his profits on *Trilby*.

The Royalty flourished in Dean Street; the Avenue stood on the site of the present Playhouse, and, where now stands the Westminster Memorial Hall, was the Imperial, a handsome but unlucky, marble-decked house, occupied at various times by Mrs. Langtry, Lewis Waller and Ellen Terry and destined later to be carted away stone by stone and converted into the Terriss Theatre at Rotherhithe. Farthest west was the Court in Sloane Square.

This does not account for all. According to the annual report of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, in 1901 there were 42 music-halls and 13 theatres under L.C.C. licence and in addition 44 theatres under the Lord Chamberlain's stage-play licence, in the Metropolitan area.

The theatre flourished, too, outside the fashionable West End area and in outer suburbia. Dramatic critics in those days covered a much wider territory in the exercise of their professional duties. (Note, for instance, in *Our Theatres in the Nineties*, how often Bernard Shaw records his visits to such remote places as the Metropole, Camberwell.) They had to journey to some of the dreariest and dingiest districts of London—now *terra incognita*, I'll be bound, to most of their present-day successors—in order to notice what very often were quite important *premières*.

The Britannia at Hoxton was still famous for its pantomimes and melodramas, and so were the Crystal Palace Theatre, the Elephant and Castle, the Grand at Islington—once the home of French *opéra bouffe*—the Pavilion, Whitechapel (which proudly styled itself “the Drury Lane of the East”), the Standard, Shoreditch, the Surrey and the West London (which had the deepest stage in London, exceeding that of Drury Lane itself) in Chapel Street, just off the Edgware Road.

In outer suburbia there were fine, well-built and up-to-date theatres in Balham, Brixton, Camberwell (Metropole), Camden Town, Clapham Junction (Shakespeare), Crouch End, Dalston, Ealing, Fulham, Hammersmith (Lyric), Kennington (Princess of Wales) Kingston-on-Thames (County), New Cross (Broadway), Notting Hill (Coronet), Peckham (Crown), Richmond (Theatre Royal), Stoke Newington (Alexandra), Stratford (Theatre Royal and Borough) and Woolwich (Artillery and Grand).

Such, with some unimportant omissions, was the theatrical layout in London when the Edwardian era began.

I believe I am right in saying that at no period in history was the theatre ever more popular in this country. All classes of society enjoyed it; it really was the people's pastime. Except for the music-hall it had hardly a rival. Organised sport was then far less developed, motoring was in its infancy and certainly offered no lure except to the rich; there were no dog tracks to entice away the multitude and, of course, the cinema was unknown. True, the public had heard of the “animated pictures” or the “biograph” but only as a curious pendant to music-hall programmes. No one saw in these flickering and fleeting shadows on the screen, in these

jerky and scratchy snatches of topical events, the germ of what, within a few years, was to be a dangerous rival to the living theatre.

So for the evening entertainment it was either the theatre, the music-hall or the concert, and I am not sure that in the larger areas it was not the theatre that came first when the choice was made. Where melodrama prevailed you could be certain of an audience largely composed of the working-classes. The humblest workers in those days were great patrons of the drama and they were amply catered for. To-day few members of their class are seen inside a theatre.

What is remarkable in my view is that theatre-going was much more of a masculine pursuit than it now is. I would say that the proportion of men to be seen in pit and gallery queues was thrice as high as in these times and that the proportion of youth was even higher.

Theatre-going was just as much the common habit in the provinces as it was in London. Apart from London there were over 260 theatres open in the British Isles in 1901, in addition to which there were, in smaller towns, the public halls and corn exchanges where theatrical performances were frequently given. There were theatres in many towns which (apart from what may have happened during the Second World War) have long since ceased to be regarded as centres of any possible theatrical business. Theatres existed in such small communities as Canterbury. In the seaside town in which I spent my early boyhood—it had a normal population of 20,000 people—there were two theatres, catering, of course, largely for summer visitors but both open during the winter. As for the larger cities, Liverpool had eight theatres, Manchester and Glasgow had seven apiece, Newcastle six, Birmingham and Edinburgh five, Walsall and Brighton four, Blackburn, Oldham, Sheffield and Southampton three.

Many of these houses were of ancient origin, inconvenient and badly equipped judged by modern standards. Some were even gas-lit. But as far as staging effect was concerned that primitive form of illumination had its advantages, for it aided scenic illusion, softening the harsh colours, enriching the stage *optique* with a subtle chiaroscuro impossible under the harsher, merciless glare of electricity.

It was not only in the provinces that gas still lingered; to the end Sir Henry Irving, a believer in its stage value, used it in his productions, taking with him his own paraphernalia wherever he went on tour. See what Ellen Terry writes in her *Memoirs*:

“We never had electricity installed at the Lyceum until Daly took

the theatre. We used gas lights and gas jets there until we left the theatre for good in 1902. I attribute much of the beauty (of scenic effect to our lighting. . . . The thick softness of gaslight, with the lovely sparks and motes in it, so like *normal* light, gave illusion to many a scene which is now revealed in all its naked trashiness by electricity."

Galleryites and pittites formed the solid, loyal but critical backbone of the playgoing public. They enjoyed the theatre, not as a social function but as an institution which, every now and again, gave them the opportunity of seeing their favourite actors and actresses appearing in a new role or in the repetition of some popular part. It was not so much the play that they discussed as the art and technique, the endearing mannerisms, of the player.

Look at the casts of some of the plays I shall shortly mention and you will perceive what opportunity they had.

But there were exceptional occasions in which perhaps the playwright did have to be taken into account. Any Pinero or Henry Arthur Jones's first-night, any new Beerbohm Tree production, any *première* at the Gaiety or at Daly's, was an important social event for all. The fashion, the fluster, the excitement, the expectation—the whole circumstances suggesting the unusual and the important—were never exceeded in later years by a Noël Coward first-night or the flurry and fashion of a new Cochran opening. A Pinero opening at the St. James's was, in its atmosphere, something unique in the theatre.

I have described the public that filled the pit and the gallery as loyal. They proved it, particularly the galleryites, by the uncomplaining stoicism with which they endured the rigours of theatre-going. Apart from the dreary waiting in unsheltered sideways and dimly lit tunnels for hours on end, they put up with incredible discomforts once inside the theatre. I look back with horror on what I once cheerfully underwent as a youthful playgoer who could never afford more than the price of a gallery seat in the West End.

I think I can truthfully claim to have experienced the inhuman conditions that prevailed in nearly every gallery of Theatreland. Some were worse than others, but the best were little less than horrible. Very few of them had separate seats—it took the arrival of the cinema to spur managements on to that form of luxury and extravagance—and very few were cushioned. In the majority of the theatres one sat or squeezed oneself into the minimum of space on one of the rows of dusty wooden shelves, peering down and awkwardly shifting to get some sort of view of what was going on within the far-away and far-below rectangle of the stage.

Some galleries were particularly notorious for combining the maximum of discomfort with the minimum of view. Those of the old Vaudeville, the original Prince of Wales's, Daly's, the Empire, the Shaftesbury, can hardly be recalled without a shudder. In some houses where there were undivided seats the managements employed "packers" whose job it was, by bullying or by coaxing, to induce the wretched playgoers to contract themselves still further into a more limited space in order to make a bit more room for new arrivals.

Yet the playgoers of fifty years ago endured these physical tortures for the sake of the play. Yes, they were indeed loyal.

But in justice to the managements it must be admitted that playgoers obtained their pleasures cheaply. Prices of admission were modest in the West End. I take at random those at the old Globe Theatre and they were typical of the majority: stalls, 10s. 6d.; dress circle, 7s. 6d. and 5s.; balcony, 4s. and 3s.; pit, 2s. 6d.; gallery, 1s.

How modest were the charges in the suburbs, exemplified by those at the Brixton Theatre which were on the same scale as those at many provincial theatres: orchestra stalls, 2s.; dress circle, 1s. 6d.; pit stalls and family circle, 1s.; pit, 6d. (Saturdays and Bank holidays), 9d.; gallery, 4d. (Saturdays and Bank holidays), 6d.

There at least you had no cause for complaint.

I have written about conditions as they were in 1901. Only five years later William Archer expressed this note of approval in commenting upon the disappearance of several of the dingy old theatres of his earlier days:

"The structural advance has been enormous—thanks largely to the County Council regulations which forbid the sandwiching of theatres between other buildings. At the east end of the Strand the cramped and dingy Globe, Opera Comique and Olympic have given place to the spacious Waldorf,¹ Aldwych and Gaiety. Farther west some half-dozen old built-in houses survive, but all of recent date are free on two sides at least and several are entirely detached from the surrounding buildings. Altogether within ten minutes' walk of Charing Cross there are about two dozen theatres and of these fifteen at least are structures of some structural prominence. Certainly, in so far as its material habitation is concerned, the drama has conspicuously reared its head and asserted itself during the past fifteen years."

¹ Now the Strand Theatre.

III

DAYS OF DRAWING-ROOM COMEDY

EVEN THE MOST INFATUATED ADMIRER OF THE EDWARDIAN theatre will admit that it had its defects. I am certainly ready to concede that—but always with the proviso that nothing can be said against the quality of the acting, conditioned as it was by the prevailing tastes of playgoers. That is to say the actors gave to the play exactly the acting it merited. They gave style and polish to drawing-room comedy, liveliness and spirit to farce, robustness and sincerity to drama, romantic dash and flourish to the picaresque, and whatever that was required to melodrama, musical comedy and the rest of it.

They were but rarely called upon, except towards the closing years, to adopt the more restrained and naturalistic style now so prevalent, but the artistes of the day were perfectly capable of supplying it when it was needed.

The superior folk who are now inclined to sneer at the type of play that held favour during the period and the manner of its presentation, are adopting an unfair form of criticism in applying to it the standards of the present-day drama.

We know that, generally speaking, a higher standard of realism and intelligence now prevails in playwriting. Of course we are much more intelligent and discriminating in these days. Of course we are better educated. Of course our standards of taste are so much superior. Of course our dramatists are great fellows who know so much more about life and the technique of playwriting. Of course any play of Shaw's, however hastily thrown off, has been hailed as a masterpiece whereas his best and early work had to be furtively tried out upon a few of the elect. Of course we are more broadminded and more free from puritanical inhibitions. Of course the Censor has grown excessively indulgent.

Of course the theatre is now open for the discussion of real problems. Of course it is bolder in its outlook and wider in its vision. Of course we have lost the snobbishness that once restrained its range. Of course so many other things—all that is granted.

Of course we *have* made progress since the century began, even

if, as I think, playgoing is a much less exciting experience than it was wont to be.

The fairest way to judge the Edwardian theatre and to assess its virtues and values, is to compare it with that of the Victorian age. When that comparison is made the most prejudiced of its critics must acknowledge that it stands out triumphantly. In comparison with it, the whole of the Victorian period of the theatre (its acting apart) is practically worthless.

By the time that King Edward came to the throne the English theatre had recovered from the stagnation into which it had sunk during Victorian times, a period during which, until the arrival of T. W. Robertson with his "teacup-and-saucer" plays—so startlingly realistic to our forebears—was unproductive of any notable dramatic work. It is singular that an era so rich in the fields of art, literature, science, philosophy, politics and religion, which could point with justifiable pride to such figures as Rossetti, Millais and Watts; to Dickens, Thackeray, Macaulay, Trollope, Meredith, Hardy, Browning, Swinburne, Tennyson and Ruskin; to Stephenson, Lister, Huxley and Darwin; to Palmerston, Gladstone, Bright, Cobden and Disraeli; to Newman, Kingsley and scores of others, failed so completely to produce one playwright of distinction comparable in his own particular sphere to the meanest and least-known of Restoration writers.

Until Robertson arrived nothing during a long period was produced that is worthy of being retained on the stage except as museum pieces and dramatic curios. Most of these dusty and trumpery reminders of the low state to which dramatic writing had once sunk would create derisive laughter if now staged. In fact when now and again one of these ancient relics is taken from the shelf and put on the stage for a week or so it is merely for the purpose of raising a cheap laugh or so by burlesque acting. (Incidentally, many of these plays were performed again and again during Edwardian times and were listened to with respect and enjoyment—which is strong testimony to the power of the actors who appeared in them.)

But of what value or interest from a literary point of view are such once admired pieces as *Still Waters Run Deep*, *Jim the Penman*, *The Lady of Lyons*, *The Lyons Mail* and *Money*? What is there in the whole of the output of Sheridan Knowles, Bulwer Lytton, Charles Reade and Tom Taylor worth a moment's consideration? At their best the plays of Dion Boucicault are only stage curiosities,

amusing enough in their way but interesting only as illustrative of a period when there were actors capable of turning shoddy into fine velvet and damask.

The best of the bunch was T. W. Robertson whose *Caste* now and again bobs up, charming to see, no doubt, as a period piece and amusing because it contains one superbly drawn and immortal character part in that of old Eccles. But what a reflection it is on the rest of Victorian theatrical achievement that this piece of naïve sentiment, of weak design and of large improbability should once have been rated so high and that its "realism" should have had such a shattering effect upon playgoers. Yet, with all the weaknesses which we now perceive, Robertson's plays deserved praise and renown in their days for they stand out as oases of brilliance in a wilderness of trash, composed of cheap melodrama, puerile burlesques and hack adaptations of dramas and comedies borrowed (with or without permission) from the French.

The names of the authors—or rather adapters—of these wretched pieces are mostly forgotten and they hardly deserve to be remembered. Apart from Sir Francis Burnand and a few others they were mostly hack writers and were held in small esteem. And so little was the prestige of the playwright of those times that they were poorly paid for their work.

As late as the thirties I knew an old gentleman, connected with the stage since his early boyhood, who at one period during his varied stage career had been attached to the staff of an inner suburban London theatre. His job had been to turn out a weekly "adaptation" for which he was paid £1 an act. At that miserable rate, and sometimes at a salary of £4 or £5 a week, he even composed original farces, comedies and melodramas.

By this can be judged the literary state of the drama even in the later part of Victoria's reign.

It hardly comes within my scope to explain why competent literary-minded men held aloof from the theatre and allowed its playwriting to be done by the undistinguished. I am glad of that for I find it very hard indeed to explain. One reason may be that the monetary rewards of the dramatist, at a time when novelists received such rich returns for their labours, were so poor that competent writers were offered little inducement to try their hands at playwriting. It is hardly surprising, indeed, that they made little attempt to break in for, as they surveyed the cheap quality of what was being produced, they must have regarded

playwriting as an occupation rather beneath their professional dignity.

There was one notable exception, however, the pioneer of the band that was destined to bring a more distinguished literary touch into the theatre. That was W. S. Gilbert whose early burlesques and extravaganzas in the mode of the period hardly suggest that they were the germ of much greater achievements. His later comedies were not without charm and freshness but when he joined in partnership with Arthur Sullivan and their comic operas began to flow it was seen that wit, style and literary grace could have their place in the theatre. They were something new indeed, for the lighter stage had hitherto known nothing better of the kind than the trifling Strand and Gaiety burlesques with their dreadfully pun-studded "books" by H. J. Byron and Burnand and the adaptations of French *opéra bouffe* of the Offenbachian school. These productions, though the music still retains its original sparkle, were certainly not distinguished by any merit in the *libretti*. With real wit and literary merit they might have lasted unto this day.

Gilbert's satirical wit and humorous invention, the charm and point of his lyrics which can be read with enjoyment even by the tone-deaf who find no pleasure in Sullivan's music, did much to relieve the later Victorian theatre from the reproach of complete aridity and inanity. Yet as his riper contributions were largely confined to the musical stage they can hardly be accounted to the credit of the legitimate drama.

Some other writers of eminence—Tennyson is a case in point—may have had a certain capacity for stage writing. Unfortunately it was not accompanied by the equally necessary skill in stage sense and dramatic construction.

Though Henry Irving had done so much to elevate the theatre, to raise the dignity and status of his profession, the stage, socially speaking, was held in very little esteem and the literary man with any kind of reputation had nothing to gain in the way of prestige by association with the theatre. Those mid-Victorian programmes into which were crowded an opening farce, perhaps a Shakespearian performance and a comedietta to wind up with, did not look very impressive, except, perhaps, as a typefounder's specimen sheet.

Probably St. John Ervine comes very near to the truth when, examining the problem, he attributes this absence from the theatre of genuine playwriting talent to the rise of the novel and to the fact

that "a nation seems not to have enough spirit to make all the arts flourish alike but is able to cultivate only one by neglecting the rest".

Even with the temporary fillip given by Robertson, the reforms in stage presentation introduced by the Bancrofts at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, and the glamour conferred on the stage so notably by Henry Irving and Ellen Terry—it should be noted that Irving contributed very little in the way of introducing and encouraging playwriting talent—the Victorian stage was woefully behind the times compared with what was happening on the Continent until it began to feel a little of the effects of the progressive movement led by Ibsen and sturdily sponsored by the Dutch-born enthusiast J. T. Grein who established the Independent Theatre in 1891.

It is not necessary to say much about the hubbub which that startling movement evoked, a movement which was opposed with all the flamboyant vituperation which the reactionary Clement Scott could so fluently command. His violent denunciation of *Ghosts* with its frenzied reference to "suburban egotists" and "bunglers" (meaning Ibsen, of course) and to "dull, undramatic, uninteresting verbosity—formless, objectless, pointless . . . not a play at all", has become a classic of wrongheaded, denunciatory dramatic criticism.

Poor Mr. Grein, personally attacked by Scott, courageously and dauntlessly suffered the penalties of the pioneer. It is even said that he was cut in the street by some who knew him.

The enraged Scott, always a perceptive judge of acting but supremely content with the theatrical world as it was and one who thought that all was the best in the best of all possible worlds, was getting a bit behind the times. But in any case he was hopelessly outnumbered, not by an army of Ibsens, Greins and Archers, but by Bernard Shaw, the red-bearded Fabian Socialist who had come from Dublin to put new vigour and a revolutionary outlook into the business of dramatic criticism. And at the same time he was trying to conquer the theatre in order to make his own message heard, to use it for his own purpose and to compel a complacent, contented public to face the facts of life, however unpleasant they might be, and to do a bit of thinking for itself. He was a magnificent champion and was determined to oust "Sardoodledom" from the theatre.

His plays were published as *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant* (1898) and *Plays for Puritans* (1900), but they were at first only privately

performed by Grein's Independent Theatre at which Clement Scott had so scornfully jeered. Most of them had to wait for public performance for a few years so that they can rightly be credited to the renown of the Edwardian theatre. But as they had been written before the end of the century a little of the glory may be apportioned to the closing years of Victoria's reign, so helping to redeem the period from an utter lack of distinction.

Some others, too, had added to the credit of the closing years, notably Oscar Wilde with, among other plays, *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895). But he was not destined to carry forward this output of comedy of artifice and wit that revived the spirit of the Restoration drama and of Sheridan into the new century and the new reign.

That many of his contemporaries were able to do. Is it right to include Arthur Wing Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones and J. M. Barrie among those who gave distinction to the last phase of the Victorian theatre, or should they be added to the credit of the Edwardian? It is a difficult question. I wish to be just, and as Jones was nearly fifty when Queen Victoria died he may perhaps be accounted as a Victorian. He had already written the best of his plays—*The Liars* and *Mrs. Dane's Defence*. Though he went on writing for many years none of his later plays, competent and interesting as they were, can be said to have added considerably to his fame.

With Pinero, who was forty-five at the time, the circumstances are somewhat different. He had begun writing very early and had already provided *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, *Trelawny of the Wells*, *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* and *The Gay Lord Quex*, all extremely popular successes. But what many regard as the best of his plays were yet to come. And that is so with Barrie who had yet to write his most notable successes.

It may be perceived that what I am trying to do is to make out a case in favour of the superiority of the Edwardian theatre as compared with the Victorian. I am anxious to be scrupulously fair, however, and I want to give all possible credit where it is due. Possibly I have said enough to prove that though signs of a definite advance had been seen in the nineties, largely owing to the influence of Ibsen and Shaw and their sponsors, the full flowering did not come until the dawn of the new century, the Victorian theatre closing with a significant blaze of great promise.

How meagre had been the product of the first fifty years of Victoria's reign, how long had Victorian playgoers had to wait for any sign of a recognition of the fact that the theatre might be used as a place for the discussion of new ideas and social problems. After all, what was the sum total of the last few years of the century but the seed that produced the harvest to be gathered in the Edwardian theatre?

I have made a fair apportionment, I think, and when the results of over fifty years on the one side are reckoned and all that happened during less than ten years is compared with them, judgment can but be in favour of the Edwardian period.

What is so evident and so striking is that within the briefer period such notable advance was made and so much accomplished to earn the respect of the intelligent public. No such progress had been made throughout the whole of Victoria's time during which, for the most part, the theatre, except for the acting, was practically at a standstill.

I have mentioned several of the reasons which suggest a right standard of comparison. It is only by bearing in mind what the theatre had achieved during the long Victorian reign and comparing the advance made in every direction during the ensuing ten years, that one can arrive at a just assessment of the significance, the interest and the value of the Edwardian contribution to the history of the British theatre.

A theatre that was no more than adolescent when Victoria died had grown into man's estate by the time King Edward's reign had ended.

In making this assessment I have in mind mainly the matter of playwriting, but there are other factors which account for the exceptional interest of the period.

As to playwriting, the definite emergence of Shaw and the arrival of many new playwrights influenced by his conception of the wider functions of the drama, the theatre offered almost continual intellectual excitement because new ideas were fermenting and new movements were being created, affecting every phase of production. It was being constantly borne upon people that the stage need not exist merely as a form of agreeable entertainment and for the presentation of what related to a world of make-believe. There was more in its purpose, urged the growing band of reformers, than to recount fables about unreal people involved in unlikely events and facing socially unimportant problems; there were other



ELLEN TERRY, BEERBOHM TREE and MRS. KENDAL in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, His Majesty's Theatre, 1902. (From the painting by the Hon. John Collier.)



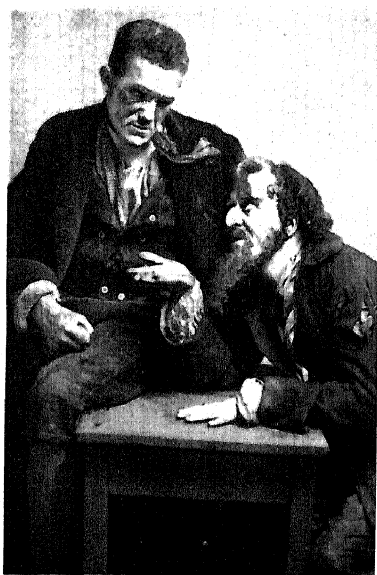
BEERBOHM TREE, BASIL GILL and CONSTANCE COLLIER in *Antony and Cleopatra*, His Majesty's Theatre, 1906.



TREE as Nero in Stephen Phillips's play, 1906.



As Paragot in *The Beloved Vagabond*, 1908.



With LYN HARDING (Bill Sikes) as Fagin in *Oliver Twist*, 1905.



As Count D'Orsay in *The Last of the Dandies*, 1901.

classes equally as interesting in their affairs as the nobility and the frothy Smart Set. There was Life itself to examine and explore.

The theatre, it was emphasised, could and should be used as a medium for the discussion of stimulating and urgent questions. It could take a vital part in contributing to the consideration of matters affecting the very structure of society. There were ethical and social problems urgently in need of ventilation in the theatre and there were many playwrights besides Shaw ready not only to contribute to the sociological drama with force and earnestness but to freshen its spirit with beauty, imagination and fantasy. And the presentation of this new spirit called for new actors, new designers and new producers, among whom notably were Granville-Barker and Gordon Craig.

Fortunately much has been left behind to remind us of the glories and excitements of those far-off years. For during that time dramatic criticism, if not at its very best—for that point was reached in the days of Hazlitt and Lamb, with a renaissance in the nineties when Bernard Shaw headed the profession with his brilliant and unsurpassed essays in the *Saturday Review*,¹ to be followed by Max Beerbohm—could boast of an unusually accomplished band of men who were able to express their minds with freedom and to an extent of space that appears incredible in these more trying times.

Clement Scott—vigorous champion of the old order, a determined reactionary and diehard opponent of Ibsenism, but for all that a stimulating writer and a superb judge of acting—had just faded out of the picture. But what a brilliant band remained!

Among them were William Archer (in the *Morning Leader*, *The Tribune* and other journals), A. B. Walkley (*The Times*), W. L. Courtney (who followed Scott, in the *Daily Telegraph*), E. F. Spence (*Westminster Gazette*), E. A. Baughan (*Daily News*), Gilbert Cannan and Anthony L. Ellis (*The Star*), J. T. Grein (*Sunday Times*), Desmond McCarthy (*The Speaker*), S. R. Littlewood (*Morning Leader*), C. E. Montague and A. N. Monkhouse (*Manchester Guardian*) and Sir Edward Russell (*Liverpool Post*).

What reading they provided. What zest and enjoyment of the theatre they expressed. Archer was a little inclined to be pedantic and unduly verbose—some of his notices in the short-lived *Tribune* ran to three thousand words in length and he would return again and again to the same play—but how patient and how penetrating was his judgment of a play, always piercing to the very heart of

¹ Reprinted in *Our Theatres in the Nineties*.

it. His knowledge of dramatic literature, English and foreign, was quite phenomenal. He seemed to have read every play that had been printed. He would patiently, even laboriously, turn a play inside out, examining every detail of its construction, testing its plausibility, analysing its dialogue and the psychology of its characterisation and producing always an essay that was as perfect in its prose as it was logical in argument.

(How Grein seized upon you and compelled you to share his gusto and enjoyment; what rein he gave to his enthusiasms) How sprightly and audacious Cannan and Ellis could be. What strong common sense and sound judgment Baughan expressed. Montague, pride of the north, undoubtedly overwrote and was too much concerned with overloading his criticisms with the rich embroideries of a fastidious mind. He was inclined to be too solemn, too school-masterly, too lofty minded. Few ordinary playgoers could live in the rarefied atmosphere in which he breathed. No one ever took the theatre with such deadly seriousness as he. The theatre, as he visualised it, was a solemn temple of the highest Art wherein it would have been sacrilege to have laughed or to have betrayed any sense of mere animal enjoyment. He was, like Mrs. Skewton, "all soul", too little concerned with the profane thought of introducing a shade of good-natured humour into his scholarly criticisms. Yet when he was treating of the play and of a piece of acting—particularly when it concerned a Shakespearian production—he made you feel that for the moment there was nothing more important in the world than the subject under consideration.

Walkley—sceptical, ironic, fanciful and Francophil—was apt at times to treat the stage with an air of tolerant patronage and amused contempt and his mannerisms looked like pretty affectations—yet what a delight it was to read him.

The writings of this critical body, and of many others, were of much more than ephemeral interest and though they now relate to far-off things they can still be read with intense enjoyment by any real playgoer.

These very able critics had the advantage not only of covering a period of the theatre momentous in events, as rich in playwriting as in acting, but one wherein daily newspapers and periodicals gave them generous space. For dramatic criticism in those days was taken very seriously, and a first-night notice was still considered as a piece of news ranking in importance with the latest political speech or report of a divorce case. The critics of the leading

newspapers—and there were twice as many of them as there are to-day—enjoyed a prestige that made them almost ambassadorial and they were regarded as personages of importance to a degree that would surprise some of our present-day smart young paragraphists and gossipers. No doubt they *were* more important.

It is true that they were verbose and sometimes unduly ponderous and pompous. A Pinero production was the occasion for notices of prodigious length and was treated as a national event. Even a trivial farce would be solemnly described, analysed and discussed to an extent much beyond its real news value or importance. But the critics were expected—or, at least, that was the convention—to take every such event seriously. How seriously this function was regarded is shown in the fact that in 1906 *The Stage* thought it necessary to print a long and solemn leader on the subject of “Degenerate Criticism”.

It deplored the “decline” of criticism into what it denounced as “smart journalism”, naming (if you please!) A. B. Walkley’s “so-called impressionism and freakishness” as well as Shaw’s “incorrigible flippancy” as the chief causes. This, it said, resulted in the efforts of “pasteboard Walkleys and slovenly Shaws who, with an egregious vanity prate of their personal affairs, their likes and dislikes, their foibles, their comings and goings” instead of devoting themselves to serious consideration of the play.

It cited as a painful example of this “impertinence” the case of the critic of a popular evening newspaper who had “the brilliant idea of treating *Othello* at length as a new play with a facetiousness in keeping with his schoolboy prose”. And in many other withering sentences it angrily denounced “the attempted coxcombrity of this dull pate”.

That leader-writer’s vocabulary would never have been equal to the task of dealing with some of the most eminent of present-day critics.

For all their solemnity it cannot be denied that the foremost critics did help enormously not only to foster an interest in the theatre as a social institution but to stimulate a healthy critical attitude towards the play and particularly to encourage interest in the art of acting. They had the space in which not only to describe and analyse the latest production in detail but in which to devote an ample portion of their essays to an illuminating picture of the manner in which it was performed. There are passages in many of these old-time notices vivid enough to bring before you again

(if you have had the opportunity of sharing the critic's experience) the very presence of the actor concerned—the accents of his speech, the manner of his movements and gestures, the flash of interpretation and inspiration that made the moment and the phrase unique and memorable for the playgoer.

It was not only in dramatic criticism alone that the theatre enjoyed the support of the Press. The existence of many theatrical weeklies and monthlies—which came and went, it is true, with rather disturbing frequency—proved that there was a public capable of being wooed if not always won, as much interested then in plays and players as the bobbysoxers of to-day are in films and film favourites. And, naturally a little more perceptive.

Even the lighter journals devoted much space not only to theatrical gossip but to criticism of the play. Particularly entertaining were L. Godfrey Turner in *Illustrated Bits*, A. M. Thompson in *The Clarion*, and Arnold Golsworthy who wrote so gaily and so cleverly under the *sobriquet* of "Jingle" in that piquant weekly, *Pick-Me-Up*, and who had his articles illustrated by such admirable artists as Jasper Weir and Charles Pears.

I may as well say, before the fact becomes patent to the reader, that I have drawn freely upon many of the critics named, in writing this book. But for that I feel no apology is needed. My excuse is that in drawing a picture of the times it is desirable to quote contemporary opinion of plays and of the players, to see them through the eyes of those who recorded their impressions within a few hours or days of the actual performance. To present the contemporary impression is indeed to fulfil a great deal of my purpose. There could be no better method of conveying the sense and atmosphere of the time than to quote from the writings of an exceptionally able and distinguished band of critics.

Concerning the more material aspects of the theatre it is interesting to note how many theatres were built or rebuilt in the West End and in suburban London as well as in the provinces during the Edwardian era.

Among the new theatres erected in London were the Apollo in 1901; the new Gaiety and the New, 1903; the Coliseum, 1904; the Aldwych, the Scala and the Waldorf (later renamed Strand), 1905; the Hicks (later Globe), 1906 and the Queen's, 1907. Theatres rebuilt or remodelled included the Adelphi (as the New Century), 1901; the Criterion, 1903; the Haymarket and the Royalty, 1905; the Lyceum (first as a music-hall) and the Playhouse

(formerly the Avenue), 1907; the Little, 1910. In addition three new theatres were opened in suburban London.

They were all handsomely designed buildings, constructed with a greater regard for the comfort and convenience of the playgoer than most of the older houses had shown. Architecturally they were not remarkable, except the Gaiety which occupied an imposing corner site between the Strand and the new Aldwych, and the Coliseum which created a new pattern in the skyline of St. Martin's Lane. They were pleasingly conventional in their interior design. New ideas in decoration had not yet come into vogue. It was still thought, rightly or wrongly, that a theatre should look like a theatre in its rococo decoration and that it should not necessarily suggest a council chamber or a coroner's court.

This activity in building is surely testimony enough, not only as to the easy financial resources of the times but as to the flourishing state of the theatrical industry.

IV

THE THEATRE IN 1901

IN FEBRUARY 1901, THE POINT AT WHICH THIS RECORD SHOULD properly begin, the playgoer had this choice of entertainment :

At His (formerly Her) Majesty's Theatre there was Beerbohm Tree's memorable revival of *Twelfth Night*, a production of poetically and elaborately designed realism with a remarkable cast in which Tree enjoyed himself vastly as a fantastic Malvolio among such other players as Robert Taber, Lionel Brough, Norman Forbes, S. A. Cookson, Fisher White, Courtice Pounds, Maud Jeffries, Lily Brayton and Maud Tree (later Lady Tree) who had ideal roles. "Everyone", wrote Lady Tree in later years, "remembers Olivia's garden, with its broad grass terraces (as a matter of fact Herbert copied this scene from a garden picture in *Country Life* ; stumbling, as he so often did upon something that months at the British Museum could not have given him)." The music was composed by Paul Rubens of musical comedy fame. The production ran for three months and it was seen by 200,000 people.

At the Haymarket, Cyril Maude, in one of his most successful parts, was evoking tears and laughter and heartbreak in Capt. Robert Marshall's *The Second in Command*, with the support of Allan Aynesworth, Herbert Sleath, Sybil Carlisle, Fanny Coleman and Muriel Beaumont.

At the St. James's there was *The Awakening*, with George Alexander, Fay Davis, H. B. Irving, Gertrude Kingston and Julie Opp.

Charles Wyndham was acting the *raisonneur* in Henry Arthur Jones's *Mrs. Dane's Defence*, nearly the best of his plays. In its exciting third act—a masterpiece of dramatic dialogue and long-sustained tension—Lena Ashwell gave her movingly emotional performance as a woman on the rack of merciless cross-examination.

Patience was running at the Savoy, with Robert Evett, Walter Passmore, Rosina Brandram, H. A. Lytton, Agnes Fraser and Isabel Jay in the cast. Marie Tempest was sparkling with impudent charm as Nell Gwyn in *English Nell* at the Prince of Wales's. In the company were Harley Granville-Barker, Frank Cooper, Ben Webster, H. B. Warner and Mabel Terry-Lewis.

Charles Hawtrey and Arthur Williams were still engaged in the long-running, tear-compelling modern morality, *A Message from Mars*, at the Avenue; Lewis Waller, William Mollison, Lily Hanbury, J. H. Barnes, E. M. Robson, Gerald Lawrence, Norman McKinnel, Franklyn Dyll, Kate Phillips and Sarah Brooke occupied Irving's temporarily let Lyceum with *Henry V*; while at the Comedy F. R. Benson and his company—which at that time included Alfred Brydone, Charles Bibby, O. B. Clarence, H. R. Hignett, Lyall Swete, George Weir (one of the greatest of Shakespearean clowns), Arthur Whitby, Lillian Braithwaite and Mabel Hackney—also offered Shakespeare. At the same theatre there were matinee performances by a German company.

The Noble Lord was at the Garrick, with Arthur Bouchier, Weedon Grossmith, George Giddens, Mrs. Charles Calvert, Annie Hughes and Ellis Jeffreys. Mrs. Patrick Campbell was appearing at the Royalty in Frank Harris's play *Mr. and Mrs. Davenport*, and there was *The Swashbuckler*, "a romantic farce", at the Duke of York's, with Herbert Waring, George Shelton and Evelyn Millard, and Martin Harvey in *A Cigarette Maker's Romance* at the Court.

At Drury Lane there was *The Sleeping Beauty*, with that incomparable pantomime pair Dan Leno and Herbert Campbell, as well as that dark-eyed, ringleted American beauty, Madge Lessing, Elaine Ravensburg and Fred Emney.

Children's plays there were in plenty, among them *Shockheaded Peter* and *The Man Who Stole the Castle* (Garrick), *Alice in Wonderland* (Vaudeville), and, of course, pantomime abounded all round London.

There were musical plays, too—three of them the most successful of their kind ever produced. And how rich they were in the talent that once adorned this particular *genre* of a peculiarly British entertainment. *San Toy* (which Marie Tempest had deserted for comedy) at Daly's had Huntley Wright, Fred Kaye, Rutland Barrington, Hilda Moody, Gracie Leigh, Topsy Sinden, Florence Collingbourne (who succeeded Miss Tempest when she fell out with George Edwardes) and Hayden Coffin, the matinee idol.

Florodora at the Lyric had Florence St. John, Decima Moore, Phyllis Rankin (Fifi of *The Belle of New York*), Louis Bradfield, Sydney Barraclough and Ben Nathan (*vice* Willie Edouin) and at the Gaiety there was *The Messenger Boy* with this imposing array: Edmund Payne, Fred Wright, junr., E. J. Lonnen, Lionel Mackinder, Willie Warde, Robert Nainby, Harry Grattan, and Arthur Hatherton;

Marie Studholme, Connie Ediss, Maud Hobson, Rosie Boote (who became the Marchioness of Headfort), Kitty Mason and Katie Seymour.

At the Palace Theatre, appearing as one of the turns and not (as later) supplying a full entertainment entirely out of its own resources and talent, was that unsurpassed troupe, The Follies, headed by Harry Pelissier, mocking the fads and topics of the moment with wit and melody.

The Empire and the Alhambra provided two of the most luxurious and comfortable resorts ever to cater for the entertainment of the "tired business man". They were "houses of international variety" and not to be confused with the mere music-hall. The red-nosed comedian and the ebullient burlesque artiste were not to be seen there but continental artistes, gymnasts, acrobats and entertainers of that kind abounded, and ballet always formed a large part of the entertainment. Each theatre maintained its own permanent *corps de ballet*. Generally they performed popular ballet rather than the classical, with subjects frequently drawn from topics of the moment. But it should be remembered that Adeline Genée, the exquisite *prima ballerina* from Denmark who was like a piece of smiling thistledown, did introduce such ballets as *The Fairy Doll* of Bayer and Delibes' *Coppelia* and *Sylvia*. For ten years from 1897 she was the reigning star at the Empire and each of her creations was a thing of pure joy and an enchanting memory. The Alhambra, too, had its dancing stars, La Belle Leonora being one of them.

Both houses provided a different kind of attraction in their famous "promenades" at the back of the circle. It was an institution that provided a constant pain in the neck to the puritanical section of the public, this gilded rendezvous for the man-about-town and the moneyed seeker after illicit pleasure. The ladies who frequented these resorts were of extreme beauty and elegance. They dressed like duchesses only rather more expensively and, as a spectacle, outrivalled the attractions of the stage. For many years the "prudes on the prowl" as they were called, headed by such notables as W. T. Stead and Mrs. Ormiston Chant, had waged a campaign against this dazzling market of the flesh. Certain modifications were made but it was not until the First World War that the promenades were abolished. The reformers had their way but the only real effect was to drive vice into darker and far more dubious resorts. And if you think that thereby an improvement in public morality was achieved you are welcome to your opinion.

This list of London attractions—a cross-section of current taste, very characteristic of the period—is illuminating and is worth examination.

As varied entertainment it was full and satisfying but almost entirely directed to the playgoer who was misguided enough to look upon the theatre only as a means of pleasant diversion and not as intellectual stimulation. It provided the mass of playgoers with just what they liked and with what most of them expected. It dealt in the most entertaining way with the world of make-believe and fantasy and there was hardly anything in it likely to appeal to those who considered there might be room for matters of a serious kind and for the discussion of social problems. Those who looked for such things were the highly intellectual minority and were regarded somewhat as cranks who took an eccentric view of the functions of the stage and its place in the social scheme.

Shaw and Ibsen? Oh, yes, they had been heard of, of course, but good heavens, what an idea! Fancy spending the evening in looking upon reproductions of what was supposed to be real life, and in puzzling one's head over problems which, if to be considered at all, were better discussed on the lecture platform or at Fabian meetings.

No, one went to the theatre to forget such unpleasant matters, to be diverted by witty conversation, by elegant productions, by charming and sentimental comedies of the salon and the drawing-room, in which well-dressed and well-mannered people were involved in nothing more serious than domestic intrigues, marital complications and infidelities which were always likely to be smoothed over towards 11 p.m.—which was just as it should be. What playgoers saw was not reality. But few wanted reality. Romance, sentiment, excitement, good dialogue, witty epigrams, dash and adventure, high-flown speeches and gallantry—that was the kind of thing the majority of people, pittites as well as stallholders, wanted.

In the list that I have given hardly one of the plays was concerned with anything that related to everyday reality or with probable situations. A few earnest-minded people thought it deplorable, no doubt. They were angered by this abandonment to mere diversion and pleasure-seeking, and scornful of those who catered for what they regarded as shallow minds. Was it all really as bad as that?

A Message from Mars was delightful and it did impart some moral

lesson of a kind about selfishness, but its treatment was in the vein of sentimental fantasy. Very entertaining but just as sentimental was Capt. Robert Marshall's *The Second in Command*. *English Nell*, *A Cigarette Maker's Romance*, *The Swashbuckler* all belonged to the realm of picturesque and romantic make-believe. *Mr. and Mrs. Daventry*, *The Awakening* and *Mrs. Dane's Defence* quite sufficiently provided what was considered to be the serious and thoughtful drama. In any case there was a plentiful seasoning of Shakesperean production at the Lyceum and the Comedy to relieve the theatre of any reproach that it was not concerned with the higher functions of the stage.

I shall have further occasion to refer to the matter of Shakesperean production, but the fact that Shakespeare was not neglected during Edwardian times, but on the contrary considerably supplied, needs some emphasis and a little repetition of the fact will do no harm. For a monstrous deal of cant and nonsense has been written by the eminent in support of the theory of shameful neglect.

Witness, for instance, what Mr. John Masefield once wrote ¹ at a time when he must have had his mind upon the period covered by this book.

"Though the plays are the greatest thing ever made by the English mind it cannot be said that the English reverence their poet. There is no theatre in London set apart for the performance of Shakespeare. There is no theatre in London built for the right production of Shakespeare. There are not in the empire enough lovers of Shakespeare, or of the poetical drama, or of poetry, to take the British stage from the hands of ground landlords, and to make it glorious with the vision of the pageant of man. These are sad things; for Art is the life. Art is the thought of man with vision. . . . Here in London, where a worldly empire is controlled, there exists no theatre in which the millions can see that other empire. They pass from one grey street to another grey street, to add up figures, or to swallow patent medicines, with no thought that life has been lived nobly, and burningly and knightly, for great ends, and with great passions, as the vision of our great mind declares."

These are fine words, no doubt, emotionally expressed, painting a picture which should cause our heads to hang in shame. Carried away by their burning eloquence at first reading, one's heart is inclined to bleed and one is tempted to add to the tears of sympathy

¹ In *William Shakespeare* (Williams and Norgate).



EVA MOORE and GEORGE ALEX-
ANDER in *Old Heidelberg*, St. James's
Theatre, 1903.



GEORGE ALEXANDER as Villon in
If I Were King, 1902.



IRENE VANBRUGH and GEORGE
ALEXANDER in *His House in Order*,
1906.



EVELYN MILLARD and HENRY
AINLEY in *Paolo and Francesca*, 1902.



LEWIS WALLER and GRACE LANE in *Miss Elizabeth's Prisoner*, Imperial Theatre, 1905.



LEWIS WALLER and EVELYN MILLARD in *Romeo and Juliet*, Imperial Theatre, 1905.



LEWIS WALLER in *Monsieur Beaucaire*, Comedy Theatre, 1902.

for Mr. Masfield in his splendid indignation and his godlike (if somewhat patronising) pity on behalf of ignoble and irreverent, medicine-swallowing clerks scurrying through grey streets in their benighted Bardless ignorance.

But then one reads again and one is struck by the fact that these words, which pour so copiously from the poet's pen, express exactly the same spirit as that which has inspired many writers of those depressing little plays of so-called realism—those supposedly veristic studies of domestic life to which one was wont to be called on cheerless Sunday evenings. How familiar is that piece of imaginative fiction, the depressed clerk without vision, symbol of the unhappy downtrodden multitude!

Again one examines Mr. Masfield's pitiful picture and one perceives what little relation it bears to reality and how impracticable are the ideals therein expressed. Lofty minds dwell on a remote plane whereon, enshrouded in mists of words and intoxicated in their own eloquence, they see nothing of what is going on among ordinary humanity.

It would be impolite to describe Mr. Masfield's eloquence as high-minded bosh. Better perhaps to say that it was just amusing nonsense and to dismiss it with a laugh. But then one is irritated by the lofty, patronising scorn expressed and the complete disregard of facts.

True, there was no austere temple dedicated to Shakespeare alone—and I wonder what the patent medicine addicts, the figure-adders and the rest of Mr. Masfield's dismal throng in the grey streets, would have thought of it if there had been.

But what of Benson who so gallantly and persistently carried the banner in those times, and of his company which was the training ground of so many notable Shakesperean actors and actresses? What of Irving and Ellen Terry, of Lewis Waller, of Forbes-Robertson, of Oscar Asche and Lily Brayton, of Arthur Bourchier and Violet Vanbrugh, of Otho Stuart? And what of Tree and his festivals?—though I can imagine the fine, superior Masfieldian scorn at that suggestion. He drew vast audiences with his Shakesperean productions, but, of course, he was base enough to present them with extravagance and lavish beauty. I suppose it was not to the point that he was willing to interrupt the run of a successful play in order to stage such a festival.

With all admiration for Shakespeare I should very much resent any attempt by a band of Bardolators to seize the theatre from the

possession of the (no doubt) wicked ground landlords and to convert the entire theatrical system to the service of Shakespeare alone, however glorious with the vision of man the result might be. That really would be too much of a good thing. Shakespeare, one acknowledges, is first and foremost—but there have been other playwrights, ancient and modern, native and foreign, whom it would be rather a pity to ignore.

But this is an example of the kind of nonsense which has been so freely written. The point of it is that one can be an admirer, even a worshipper, of Shakespeare without being a complete fanatic and without losing one's sense of proportion and without doing an injustice to those who have done some service to the State. To condemn the entire Edwardian theatre—for that is to be implied from the call to wrest it from the ground landlords—is wanton enough but what annoys one more is the bland omission of any acknowledgment of what was done in the service of Shakespeare by so many actors and actresses, and quite notably, during King Edward's reign.

V

SUNSET OF IRVING

WRITING IN 1901 THE VETERAN CRITIC JOSEPH KNIGHT rhapsodised considerably about the flourishing and enhanced state of the stage.

"Not an exhibition of the Royal Academy is there on the walls of which are not displayed portraits by our principal painters of our best graced actors, and scarcely an important revival the decoration, scenery and dresses of which have not been devised by painters of eminence, from a Long to an Alma Tadema," he wrote. "The first musicians of the day not only collaborate with authors but contribute the music to non-lyrical pieces. The public attracted to a first entertainment at a favourite house is the most brilliant from every standpoint that London can supply. When, moreover, as sometimes happens, a new work that, even of a master, fails wholly to commend itself, the evening of the playgoer has rarely been wasted. Almost to a certainty 'the show' is worth seeing if only for the beauty of the decorations, the *ensemble* and the rhythmic perfection of the acting. Books on the stage multiply, fiction chooses as its heroines stage personages, real and imaginary; and articles on subjects dramatic and histrionic are the constant occurrence in reviews and magazines, which constitute a large—sometimes, one is apt to fear, too large—a portion of our reading. How close is the union between the stage and the highest intellect of the day is best shown in the fact that plays are beginning to rank once more as literature."

And he went on to say that the dramatic outlook was no less brilliant than that of the stage, adding, "We can point unhesitatingly to well nigh a dozen houses at which plays are mounted as well as at any Continental theatre, and to half that number at which the acting is equal to the best that Europe and America can boast."

So all the prospect was fair? Not exactly, for Mr. Knight ended with this reflection:

"If it is asked whether any serious menace exists to histrionic art, it seems well to say that there are two sources of danger. Admirably as works the system of actor-management—and *no lover of art would dream of dispensing with it*—(my italics) it leads at times to

such over-elaboration of style in a principal part as destroys the firm balance of which the highest efforts rest. Even more serious is the fact that those in a position to choose their own parts are sacrificing to a wild craving for sympathy the desire to furnish revelations of human character. There are some of our great artistes who fail to recognise that a character may be clearer to us because of its infirmities or greater because it is repellant. The attempt to secure sympathy for Iago has not yet been made. There are characters, however, from the greatest in Shakespeare down to the latest invention of our existing dramatists, that would be riper, more artistic and more effective if the attempt at idealisation, and almost as it seems, apotheosis, were abandoned."

Here Joseph Knight touched upon one aspect of actor-management which other critics of the system appear to have overlooked ; at least I have not read other disparagements expressed on exactly the same point. But note the italics : "No lover of art would dream of dispensing with it." If too apprehensive about the danger of actor-managers distorting their roles in order to gain sympathy he was wise in that observation.

When King Edward came to the throne the most important part of the West End theatre was in the hands of those much maligned figures, as it had been for many years.

This reminder may cause a quiver of scorn to run through the souls of those artistic few who rejoice in the comparative disappearance of a once flourishing and honourable institution, believing that the stage should not be fettered to personalities who control the destinies, artistic and commercial, of a theatre, select its plays and commission the playwrights, and at the same time choose the leading roles for themselves.

We have to-day a body of critics who complain that the theatre is controlled by the commercial managements and by speculators who are more interested in bricks-and-mortar, in the profits of letting and sub-letting, than in matters of artistic direction and the progress of the drama.

If both systems are evils which is the greater ? There can be little argument on that question. But those who remember something of the glamour of the Edwardian theatre are not prepared to enter into any discussion at all. They regret something that has been lost. The actor-manager system may have had its abuses but the one clinching argument in its favour is that the theatre is all the better for the leadership of those who not only derive their

living from the actor's calling but have a genuine and passionate interest in it. The stage was singularly fortunate and the playgoer as singularly happy when it had an Irving, a Tree, a Wyndham, an Alexander and a Waller as recognised leaders of the profession of acting and as controllers of their own theatres. Lately we have seen something of a revival of the system. Sir Laurence Olivier and John Clements have embarked upon active actor-management and who is to say that the theatre, recovering from the harassed conditions of wartime and post-war poverty, has not been the better artistically for what they have done?

One is aware that the old-time actor-managers were not inspired in everything they attempted. They had their failures, of course. But the general results were splendid. They gave not only the considerable glamour of their presence to the stage; they gave prestige and dignity to the profession. They cherished and preserved its best traditions. They gave it stability and assurance. They were able to gather round them distinguished actors and actresses. They were able to build up an *ensemble* of acting. With stability they were able to devote time to the perfection of their craft and to the details of production. They were not hurried into slap-dash presentations and chance selections.

They were able to encourage and to commission playwrights in producing their best work.

There may be something in the argument that the playwright should not write to exact measurement, that he should be inspired by some noble idea, by some passionate conviction, by some haunting theme, rather than by the purpose of inventing a striking part to suit the characteristics, the particular mannerisms and aptitudes, of this or that actor and actress.

No doubt that was the way in which very often Pinero and others of his time once went to work in designing plays for the actor-manager. But every play must have a germ out of which it is to grow, and the known personality of the actor, his powers in their range and limitations, provided as good an inspiration as much abstract thinking might furnish. But that argument need not be pursued. The fact is that however plays may have originated in the minds of the playwright they were as satisfactory to the playgoer as they were to those who financially profited by them.

So much in defence of the actor-manager and against the accusation that he stultified the playwright and hampered his invention. Is it to be asserted, moreover, that the actor-manager always played

for safety, that he never ventured or displayed courage and declined to take risks? And did so much glamour and excitement ever attend the business of theatre-going as in the old days when they controlled the fortunes of the best of the West End theatres?

* * *

In 1901 Sir Henry Irving, first of the actor-knights, was still the acknowledged head of the profession and leader of the stage; first of the actor-managers, too, as he had been since 1878 when he took over the Lyceum Theatre. Seven years earlier he had laid the foundation of his fame as Mathias in *The Bells*, a part which he continued to play almost to the end of his career in 1905.

There is no name in the entire history of the profession which rings with so much romance, mystery and thrill as that of Irving; no picture that we have so fully embodies the ideal actor type. Those thin ascetic features, the fine lofty brow and the sweep of hair, the firm but sensitive mouth, the commanding nose and chin and the keen narrowed eyes beneath the bold, well-marked brows—in every portrait they arrest you and suggest how imposing that tall, spare, stooping figure must have been on the stage, particularly in any role that conveyed the bizarre and the macabre.

Was he the greatest of our actors? Did he outshine Garrick and Kean? Authorities differ. As W. L. Courtney once wrote:

“There are many well-qualified judges who did not admire him as an actor. Criticism of his various impersonations are to be found which tend rather towards disparagement than praise. Moreover it can certainly be asserted that some of the characters which he essayed were by no means congenial to his peculiar powers.”

One authority who disputed his power of moving listeners was E. A. Baughan who once wrote:

“During the twenty odd years I remember Irving as an actor he was lacking in that power on the stage. His intensity hypnotised me, but I was awed by his weirdness and strangeness rather than moved by the emotional appeal of his acting. Everything helped this magnetic power—Irrving’s strange voice, fantastic bearing, ascetic face, and curious, compelling eyes. It is possible that he was not able to endow his playing with the emotional power which Mr. Bram Stoker¹ relates was characteristic of his reading in private owing to his physical endowment not being strong enough for the stage.”

One has heard as much about his mannerisms—his peculiarities

¹ His biographer.



OSCAR ASCHE as Maldonado in *Iris*
Garrick Theatre, 1901.



CHARLES HAWTREY as himself.



CYRIL MAUDE as Lord Meadows in
Toddles, Duke of York's Theatre, 1906.



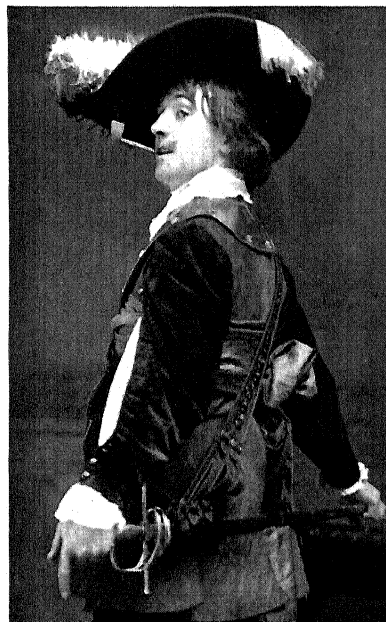
CYRIL MAUDE as Dr. Pangloss in *The*
Heir at Law, Waldorf Theatre, 1906.



JULIA NEILSON and FRED TERRY in *Dorothy o' the Hall*, New Theatre, 1906.



OSCAR ASCHE and LILY BRAYTON
in *The Virgin Goddess*, Adelphi Theatre,
1906.



MARTIN HARVEY in *The Breed of the
Treshams*, Lyric Theatre, 1906.

of speech,¹ his dragging gait and all that—as about his virtues. Ellen Terry in her *Memoirs* records how once he said to her, “How strange it is that I should have made the reputation I have as an actor, with no equipment. My legs, my voice—everything has been against me. For an actor who can’t walk, can’t talk and has no face to speak of, I’ve done pretty well.” And on another occasion he told her, “Physical gifts of voice, beauty, etc., are the best equipment for an actor, and I believe I am the only actor on record who has succeeded in spite of having none of these gifts.”

For a proud man he seemed to be very little aware of his striking physical appearance.

But ask any old playgoer who saw Irving in his prime and he will tell you that every memory of him lives vividly in his mind while the impressions of most other actors of note have dimmed and faded. Probably only Kean possessed such magnetic power over the beholder.

William Archer, who saw him in most of his great roles, described him as one of the most picturesque figures in our theatrical history, a man of genius and an actor of extraordinary talent. “He was”, he said, “essentially a character actor rather than a tragedian; he lacked the physical power necessary to anyone who would scale the heights of tragedy. He was at his very greatest, perhaps, in the last part he was to act, that of Thomas Becket. His portraiture of the superb and indomitable statesman-prelate was unique in its dignity and impressiveness. Of his parts Iago, Wolsey, Richard III, Iachimo and Shylock were incontestably the most memorable. Of his non-Shakespearian parts his Charles I may rank as a companion to his Becket, while his Louis XI and his Dubosc and Lesurques came close behind.”

Much of what has been written about his performances as Shylock, as Mathias in *The Bells* and as Becket in Tennyson’s play, is too familiar to need repeating, but here is a glimpse of him as Louis XI as J. T. Grein saw him: “A cynical demon, a cruel fiend, a lecherous satyr. He hisses and grunts, he crows and gibbers; he is now shrill, now almost inarticulate. . . . The astonishing part of Henry Irving’s performance is that all these effects come easily to him; there is not the smallest trace of effort; he acts the whole time as if he were enjoying the fun of the thing.”

¹ “He would say ‘Gud’ for God; ‘Cut-thrut dug’ for ‘Cut-throat dog’ (Shylock); ‘Tack the rup from mey nek’ for ‘Take the rope from my neck’ (Mathias in *The Bells*); ‘Ritz’ for ‘rich’ (Mathias).”—Gordon Craig in *Henry Irving*.

Those who saw Irving only in his later years will cherish, almost above all, as an evergreen memory, his performance as Corporal Gregory Brewster in Conan Doyle's *Waterloo*. It was only a one-act piece but it provided for him the opportunity for a perfect cameo of acting. First performed early in the nineties it remained in his repertory to the end of his career as one of his most popular and admired impersonations.

Brewster, the ancient survivor of Waterloo, was a full-length portrait rather than a sketch or a dramatic fragment. It represented the pathos and humour of extreme age left solitary and living only on great memories. Irving's physical presentation of the character was masterly in its make-up, fully realising Conan Doyle's description of the old man in the short story upon which the playlet was founded—"A huge, twisted old man, gaunt and puckered, with twitching hands and shuffling, purposeless feet. A cloud of fluffy white hair, a red-veined nose, two thick tufts of eyebrows and a pair of dimly questioning eyes."

As a study of senility it was a triumph of close and sympathetic observation. One never lost sight of the fact that, although the flame of life flickered brightly now and again in the gnarled veteran, the candle was burning low. The enchanting feature of Irving's acting, however, was its admirably sustained unconscious humour, its delicate pathos and its genuine realism.

Let such a piece of character-acting be set beside those of the noble, dying Becket and the terror-haunted Mathias and some measure of the range of Irving's powers may be grasped.

But whatever difference of opinion there may be concerning his qualities as an actor there can be none about his dominating personality. "It was rather in virtue of his personal dignity than purely acting talent that he merited the national honour paid him at his death and burial in Westminster Abbey," wrote William Archer.

It is said that in any career he might have chosen, whether in the Church, in Diplomacy or in Law, he would have been a leader of his calling and who, looking at any portrait of Irving can doubt that?

Irving, of course, was the grand survivor of the Victorian theatre and his continuance into the Edwardian reign was only the glorious sunset of his long domination of the stage. There is something pathetic yet noble about the gallant struggle of those last few years during which he carried on the tradition in spite of increasing ill health.

Towards the close of the century his fortunes and his health had sadly declined. Some of his later productions at the Lyceum had been failures. The definite turning point in his long success came in 1898 when the bulk of his large and costly stock of scenery, stored in South London, was destroyed by fire. Six months later, while acting in Scotland, he was stricken down with pleurisy and pneumonia and a long illness left him permanently enfeebled. He encountered financial difficulties in 1899 with the result that his interests in the Lyceum Theatre were transferred to a company, and a disastrous transaction that subsequently proved to be, and a very bad bargain for Irving.

His "farewell" season before his American tour was brought to a close at the Lyceum in July 1901 with a performance of *Coriolanus*. Though he produced the play on a scale of magnificence it was hardly a happy choice and was certainly not the occasion of great acting. Wrote one critic :

"It is difficult to see why Sir Henry Irving should have selected a Shakesperean tragedy such as this which, though it lends itself well to scenic magnificence, affords leading parts entirely unsuited to either his own or Miss Ellen Terry's personality. Henry Irving has not the youth or the vital force, the robust manner or the fiercely individualistic temper needed for the role of Coriolanus ; and his best moments were those in which personal distinction and quiet pathos must be displayed. . . . In fact the main attraction of the Lyceum *Coriolanus* must certainly be described as scenic."

However, the subsequent tour of the United States was one of considerable profit. He returned to the Lyceum in 1902 with a revival of *Faust*, followed by *The Merchant of Venice*. This was his last appearance at his old theatre for his company was unable, through lack of funds, to carry out the various structural alterations demanded by the London County Council. As a result he undertook a season at Drury Lane Theatre with an expensive and elaborate production of *Dante*, written by MM. Sardou and Moreau and translated by his son Laurence. It was a magnificently staged but disappointing affair, a series of incidents and stage pictures resembling a patchwork of Boccaccio rather than a presentation of the poet and of his "Inferno". Remarking on its inaccuracies *The Times* said that Dantists would invent an additional circle in Hell for the especial benefit of MM. Sardou and Moreau "who have laid sacrilegious hands on one of the greatest poems in the literature of the world". It added, "While the Dantists will be exasperated

the average playgoer in search of a play will be more than half disappointed. But there is always the scenery, the stupendous mechanical effects, the triumphs of stage management. And there is always Sir Henry Irving. As for Sir Henry it is, of course, obvious that if ever a man was born to *look* like Dante to the life he is the man. The moment that he emerges from the porch of the church at Pisa you recognise the fresco profile. And he wanders through the play—for really he is only a wanderer, a bystander, a perambulating commentator—with just the right air and accent of ascetic severity and melancholy aloofness.”

Though Irving did all that was physically possible for the part the fact could not be disguised that it was a puerile play. It was the last new production that Irving was destined to stage.

After that Drury Lane season came the beginning of the end. There is no sadder reading in Bram Stoker's reminiscences than the record of the last months of the actor's career.

“He had since his illness gone through the rigours of two American winters”, he writes, “without seemingly ill effect. But now he began to lose strength. Still, despite all he would struggle on, and acted nightly with all his old self-unsparing energy and fire. The audiences saw little difference; he alone it was who suffered. . . . Had he been able to take a prolonged rest, say for a year, he might have completely recovered from the injury to his lung. But it is the penalty of public success that he who has achieved it must keep it. The slightest break is dangerous; to fall back or to lose one's place in the running is to be forgotten. He therefore made up his mind to accept the position of failing health and strength and set a time limit to his further efforts.”

So it was that on January 1, 1904, he announced that he proposed to retire at the conclusion of his fifty years on the stage. That, he said, would give him two years in which to bid farewell to his public. During that time he proposed to tour the United States and Canada, as well as to undertake three provincial tours of twelve weeks each and two London seasons.

The farewell tour began at Cardiff on September 19 and the affectionate and emotional scenes there were typical of those experienced all over the provinces. At Sunderland, where in 1856 he had made his first appearance, he was given a banquet and presented with an address on behalf of the civic authorities and the townspeople.

A second provincial tour began at Portsmouth on January 23,

1905, a progress not only of exhausting journeys and performances but of receptions, dinners, addresses and other ceremonial functions, during which time Irving became so ill that his condition gave cause for great anxiety. At Wolverhampton in March the tour had to be abandoned and the visit to America postponed.

Such was Irving's indomitable will and so remarkable were his recuperative powers, however, that after a few weeks' rest at Torquay he was able to undertake a six weeks' season at Drury Lane, beginning on April 29 and he carried it through without apparent ill effect.

The last night of the season, June 10, was one never to be forgotten by anyone who was present, wrote Bram Stoker. "It almost seemed as if the public had some pre-recognition that it was the last time they would see Irving play." The house was crowded in every part—the biggest audience Irving had ever played to. He performed his role in *Becket* and Corporal Brewster magnificently on that occasion, inspired, it seemed, by the affectionate enthusiasm of his audience.

Writes one who was present: "Gallery and pit gave vent to their excitement in an inarticulate roar; the occupants of the stalls and circle lost their habitual impassiveness and stood up cheering and waving hats and handkerchiefs. So great was the excitement that when Sir Henry appeared before the curtain he could not for some minutes gain a hearing. Then he spoke saying that in the autumn he would be fulfilling engagements in many cities in England and Scotland before fulfilling engagements in the United States, and he looked forward with delight to meeting them again. He found it difficult to master his deep emotion."

There followed a touching ceremony in which Irving invited the audience to take part. It was the presentation of a loving cup from the workmen of all the theatres throughout the kingdom. And so the audience, cheering to the last, reluctantly left the theatre—"a worthy finish to a lifetime of loving appreciation of the art-work of a great man," as Bram Stoker remarks.

All that follows is a sad, familiar tale which touches the heart of the least sentimental. The autumn tour was fixed to begin at Sheffield on October 2. From Sheffield Irving went to Bradford where the watchful and solicitous Bram Stoker noticed an increasing weakness in his adored chief. "We had by now been accustomed to certain physical feebleness—except when he was on the stage," he writes. It was thought well that he should be relieved of playing his exhausting part in *The Bells* for the rest of the tour.

Why did an actor, so obviously failing in his strength, have to continue a tour that was causing too great a demand upon the physical resources of a sick man of sixty-seven?

"His will was the controlling power of his later as of his earlier days," says Bram Stoker. "Moreover he *could not* stop. To do so would have been final exhaustion. His affairs were such that it was necessary to go on for the sake of himself in such span of life as might be left to him, and for the sake of others. The carrying out of his purpose of going through his farewell tours would mean the realisation of a fortune; without such he would begin the unproductive period of age in poverty. Accustomed as he had been for many years to carry out his wishes in his own way: to do whatever he had set his heart on and to help his many friends and comrades, to be powerless in such matters would have been to him a never-ending pain of chagrin. All this, of course, over and above the ties and duties of his family and his own personal needs. He was a very proud man and the inevitable blows to his pride would have been to him worse than death—especially when such might be obviated by labour, howsoever arduous or dangerous the same might be. We who knew him well recognised all this. All that we could do was to keep our own counsel and to help him to the best of our respective powers."

So came that night at Bradford when he gave his last performance on any stage. The part was Becket which, it was noted, he played with all his old deeply touching power. Becket's last words in the play were "Into Thy hands, O Lord! Into Thy hands," and, they were Irving's last words in the theatre for there was no curtain speech that night.

Less than an hour later he fainted on reaching the Midland Hotel and he was dead before the doctors arrived. The cause of death was sheer physical weakness. He had lost breath and had not strength to recover it.

Irving's funeral on October 20 was the occasion of a public funeral and burial of the cremated remains in Westminster Abbey. It was perhaps the most imposing honour ever accorded to a member of the acting profession. On the coffin over the heart was placed a floral cross sent by Queen Alexandra. Attached to it was a ribbon on which she had written "Into Thy hands, O Lord! Into Thy hands." And near the coffin was placed a wreath sent by Ellen Terry, so long the actor's partner.

In Irving's death there was a dignity that had accompanied

him throughout his career, in public and private life as on the stage. Though he may have had his limitations as an actor—he was essentially a romanticist and nothing of the intellectual realist—he contributed greatly to the art of acting. His theatre was the actor's theatre, not the playwright's. All his most noted character creations were during the Victorian period but Edwardian playgoers were privileged to see something of that uncanny and mesmeric power that he so remarkably exercised upon the stage.

He was a leader such as the stage had never previously known and is perhaps unlikely to know again. Some majesty and authority went out of the calling at his death.

His personal character affords a fascinating and baffling study. The more one reads of him the more one fails to discover the real Irving. He was full of strange contradictions.

His generousities and benevolences were well known. He was a lavish host and was unsparing in his rewards for simple services. He was invariably courteous and considerate. He had a vast circle of friends in every sphere of life. Yet he was an essentially lonely man.

He inspired devotion and tremendous affections. Those who knew him best have expressed their regard for him in almost extravagant terms. Witness the many passages so touchingly worded in Bram Stoker's reminiscences. And what could more deeply show how great was the love he inspired than those pathetic words of the invalid J. L. Toole, his almost lifelong friend who, when the news of Irving's death was broken to him said, "Then let me die, too."

Nevertheless there seemed in his make-up some cold and inhuman strain. Generous as he could be towards his associates and members of his company, he rarely praised; even his opinions about the acting of his own sons were curt and often disparaging. He was never known to praise the work of any of his fellow-artistes. He could be cutting about them but, generally speaking, he did not seem at all interested in them.

Apart from Bram Stoker, Ellen Terry probably knew more about him and understood his character better than any other person and in her *Memoirs* she has such things as this to say of him:

"I think it is not quite right in him that he does not care for anybody much."

"His worst is his being incapable of caring for people, sons, friends, anyone, and his lack of enthusiasm for other people's work or indeed for anything outside *his own* work."

"Still, such an overbalancing amount of virtues, that he is quite one of the best and most remarkable men of his time."

Many actors learnt their art under his banner: the list, in fact is very notable. Those who served him longest were those who spoke most highly of him.

During his management of the Lyceum the takings for plays in which he appeared amounted to £2,000,000 but he died leaving the comparatively modest fortune of £20,527.

Irving was the last upholder of the Victorian tradition of romantic acting, that is to say, acting which drew its interest from the personality of the actor rather than from the literary quality of the play. True, many of his triumphs were in Shakesperean plays but, apart from Shylock, he found his most notable parts in such shoddy stuff as *The Bells*, *The Corsican Brothers*, *The Lady of Lyons*, and *The Lyons Mail*, all of which, as far as acting purposes are concerned, are now practically forgotten and have been seen very rarely on the stage since his death. It was only his vivid personality, the uncanny power which he infused into them, that kept them on the stage for so long.

It must be admitted that the kind of play in which he best shone had grown old-fashioned even in his lifetime. No other actor of front rank clung so persistently to the drama of mid-Victorian times. And as far as the Shakesperean drama was concerned he had been out-distanced in the matter of elaborate and meticulously accurate realistic presentation by Tree. There is this to be said in his favour: he did produce three plays by Tennyson. Otherwise his service to contemporary literature was very slight.

The modern play of realism with its "naturalistic" acting made little appeal to him and, indeed, it is difficult to imagine that he would have been at ease in anything like conventional drawing-room comedy.

He was often blamed for not encouraging the modern dramatists but the fact is none of them wrote the kind of play that suited his highly individual style and temperament. He had toyed at one time with the idea of producing Barrie's *The Professor's Love Story* but he came to the conclusion that it was unsuited to the scale of his theatre, in which he was certainly right. The opportunity went to E. S. Willard who made a striking success of it, and, one is bound to think, was more at home in the part than Irving would have been. Irving had also considered Shaw's one-act piece *A Man of Destiny* but nothing came of the idea. It could scarcely have suited him.

Against the charge of this lack of encouragement of the contemporary dramatist, Miss Christopher St. John made a spirited reply in her gracious tribute to the actor written not long after his death.

"I should like to ask in return", she retorted, "what was the literature of his times, so far as the stage was concerned, and what the modern dramatists of England did for him? He considered the immature theatrical efforts of Mr. J. M. Barrie and Mr. Bernard Shaw, but when he found them unsuited to his purpose, will anyone seriously maintain that he showed indifference to 'literature'? As for Mr. Pinero, I think it is common knowledge that Irving often asked him for a play, and the dramatist confessed himself unable to write a man's part of the necessary importance. This seems to be borne out by the fact that Mr. Pinero's best plays have been written for actresses. Were there many plays of tremendous merit lying neglected, yet worthy of this great interpreter?"

And she pointedly ended:

"That Henry Irving was indifferent to the claims of the highest forms of drama can hardly be contended in face of the fact that he devoted his best years and his whole fortune to honouring Shakespeare, and this at a time when Shakespeare spelled ruin to the actor-manager, in hard reality, not only in a favourite phrase."

In any case it must be remembered that the Lyceum, so long his home, was not a house at all suited to the then modern type of play. With its ample space it was admirably adapted to grand-scale Shakesperean production and to picturesque melodrama, and I imagine that its architecture and its decorations provided exactly the appropriate framework. But the problem play and the drawing-room comedies of Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones, with all their intimate dialogue, would have fared ill within its classic walls, however good the casting.

It was not only that Irving's plays, the repertoire into which he so constantly dipped, had become out-moded; the theatre itself was old-fashioned. Its history, after Irving's departure, was to become chequered. Two years later it was elaborately rebuilt and refurbished and turned into a music-hall. How must that have affected the feelings of Irving! The spell of variety was brief and unsuccessful but there was worse to come. I do not refer to the long and successful régime of melodrama—after all, many of such productions were not greatly below the literary standard of some of Irving's plays—and pantomime which the brothers Melville so long

conducted there, but to the fact that after being condemned to destruction shortly before the Second World War, it was given a reprieve, not that it might once more be devoted to the drama—a fitting memorial to Irving—but that in order that it should become a *palais de danse*. Alas, poor Yorick!

VI

THE IRVING-TERRY PARTNERSHIP

IN THE HISTORY OF THE BRITISH THEATRE THERE HAS BEEN NO more remarkable acting partnership than that between Henry Irving and Ellen Terry, just as no more gracious and endearing actress has ever adorned the stage than Miss Terry.

No actress has ever so surely touched the hearts of playgoers. She won their affections as woman as well as actress by force of her abounding and joyous and intensely feminine nature, and she retained it to the very end of her long career. She was the ideal embodiment of the Shakesperean heroine, for all the essential qualities with which such characters as Portia and Beatrice are endowed were hers by nature. She was the perfection of what someone has aptly described as "that union of hearty gaiety and essential purity of mind" which is the attribute of so many of Shakespeare's women.

"Hear that laugh which sums up all human joyousness, hear the sounds of that mellow voice vibrating with sweet sorrow for all who suffer, veiling the sobs with laughter. Here is a personality all aglow with reasonable humour, exuberant with the wealth of life, resplendent with womanliness, physical and spiritual in splendid equipoise," wrote one admirer concerning her performance as Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, a part with which her name will ever be associated.

That description I would endorse, adding that to me she was the ideal embodiment of wit, of gaiety and of tender, radiant beauty—exquisite components of Shakespeare's most enchanting of women.

Yet, when as an entirely enraptured boy I was dazzled by her enchantment—and it was as Beatrice that I first saw her—she was fifty-seven years of age. I knew nothing about her years and was too intent upon her merry performance to speculate about it. But I must have been aware from family talk that she was at least mature. Yet to me—and the memory of that performance is still vivid in my mind—she was just joyous youth itself.

But, of course, she was always young. How she contrived to be so was her secret, but it is a certain fact. Some inner radiance of spirit preserved her youth.

She was at an age at which many actresses have retired from the stage when King Edward came to the throne but she had many more years in which to delight playgoers. She belongs as much to the Edwardian period as to the Victorian for she outlived it and brought her radiance into the Georgian era.

So long had the partnership with Irving endured and so many of his greatest triumphs had she shared that the announcement of their break came as a sensation in 1902. It was unbelievable. It was known that Irving's fortunes had waned and that he was an ailing man. The wildest of rumours concerning quarrels and disagreements circulated.

In the preface to his published correspondence with Ellen Terry many years later Bernard Shaw mischievously claimed to have destroyed her belief in Irving, and possibly he did have some influence in her decision to part with him. But that decision was really an act of wisdom.

In her *Memoirs* she writes : "The idea that I deserted a sinking ship is rubbish. I think I did Henry a real service by refusing to play in his last new production, *Dante*. It was a service that cost me £12,000, the sum I was offered to accompany him to America in *Dante* after its production at Drury Lane."

And again : "The accusation that he treated me badly is as silly as the accusation that I treated him badly. . . . I can only say that we never quarrelled and that our separation could not be avoided."

The explanation of the break is simple. It was merely the inevitable working of "the relentless hand of Time".

The fact is Ellen Terry loyally served Irving until she realised that she could no longer be of use to him. During their long association they had acted together in twenty-seven different plays. In nineteen of these Miss Terry had played what were practically juvenile parts which, in the course of time, had become unsuitable for her. There remained only eight plays in their repertory. Two of these, *Macbeth* and *Henry VIII*, were out of the question because all the scenery and "props" for the productions had been destroyed in the disastrous fire. Two other plays, *Coriolanus* and *Peter the Great*, were not popular with the public. *Robespierre* had had its day. *Charles I* was too melancholy for audiences. So there remained only *The Merchant of Venice*, which could not be acted perpetually. Ellen Terry rightly concluded that she might be engaged more usefully elsewhere, and in that opinion she was as much concerned with Irving's fortunes as with her own.

Her departure, of course, was regarded as a blow to Irving. As Percy Fitzgerald writes in his biography of Irving: "The secession of Miss Terry was a serious loss indeed. Half the interest in his own exhibitions was gone with her, for it was notorious that many admirers held that hers was the secret attraction of the theatre—that her magic, charm, vivacity and versatility were what drew the audience; that though nominally his assistant her talent almost overpowered his. We might contend that each was necessary to the other, and from constant companionship had come to draw unsuspected gifts and charms."

Early in the spring of 1902 she had played Queen Katharine in Benson's company at Stratford on Avon in fulfilment of a promise made twenty years previously. That inspired in her the feeling, as she wrote, "that there was life in this old 'un yet", and that she need not retire from the stage because she was being forced into retirement from the Lyceum.

After that exhilarating experience she found that there was nothing for her to do but to return to Irving and to play twice weekly in his provincial tour, for there were few suitable parts for her in his then limited repertory.

It was a depressing outlook for her and she was finding the position intolerable when came an offer from Tree to play Mistress Page (with Mrs. Kendal as Mistress Ford) in his memorable production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* at His Majesty's Theatre in June 1902.

"Heaven give you many merry days and nights," telegraphed Irving on the opening night, proof enough of the cordial friendship that still bound them. It should be remembered that the actual break had not yet come, for all the time that Miss Terry was at His Majesty's she continued to play at matinees of *Charles I* and *The Merchant of Venice* with Irving at the Lyceum and was even negotiating with him about the possibility of appearing in *Dante* during the forthcoming American tour. Her last appearance at the Lyceum was on July 19, 1902 but she continued to appear with Irving during his provincial tour that year.

Tree's revival of *The Merry Wives* was superbly cast. He made of it a spectacular masquerade full of riotous Rabelaisian frolicking. Elaborately paunched and made up he enjoyed himself vastly as Falstaff and, inventing new bits of business at every performance, no doubt rather overplayed the part, as many critics complained. But it was all in the farcical spirit of the production in which Oscar

Asche (Ford), Henry Kemble (Dr. Caius), Courtice Pounds (Sir Hugh Evans), Mrs. Tree (Anne Page), Lionel Brough and Zeffie Tilbury, also appeared.

But the outstanding triumph was achieved by Miss Terry and Mrs. Kendal, a superb partnership of merriment and high comedy. "Some people accused the merry wives of rollicking overmuch, but these were the people", remarked Miss Terry, "who forgot that we were acting in farce, and that farces will be farces even when Shakespeare is their author. All that summer I enjoyed myself thoroughly. It was all such good fun. Mrs. Kendal was so clever and delightful to play with, Mrs. Tree was so indefatigable in discovering new funny business."

After the run of *The Merry Wives* and her final appearance with Irving, Miss Terry decided to embark upon management herself. It was a tribute to her courage but, considering all the circumstances, it was hardly a wise venture and it proved disastrous financially. She resolved to take a theatre with her son Gordon Craig who, after promising appearances in Irving's company, had, with characteristic impulse, made up his mind to abandon acting in favour of stage design. In his notions of *décor* and lighting he was much in advance of his time and was particularly in revolt against the prevailing realistic convention. He was a rebel from the start and yearned to impose his revolutionary ideas upon the stage, which was as little prepared to receive him with enthusiasm as was the playgoing public who looked upon him as an impracticable idealist and eccentric.

It is obvious that Ellen Terry chose Ibsen's *Vikings* as her first venture (which began in April 1903) more with the desire to please her son than to please herself. It was not an ideal play for her, nor was the rarely successful Imperial Theatre at Westminster an ideal one, either for the play or for Craig's notions for stage decoration. "We had to disembowel the Imperial behind scenes before we could even make a start," writes the actress in her *Memoirs*, "and then the great height of the proscenium made his lighting lose all its value."

Even many of Craig's admirers—Shaw among them—were critical about his treatment of the gloomy Ibsen; but Ellen Terry generously took all the blame for the failure of the production in which she played the part of Hiordis, which could scarcely have been congenial to her. There was some display of first-night enthusiasm, more a tribute to the actress than to the play, but it

did not draw the public and it had to be withdrawn before the second of her productions, *Much Ado About Nothing* was ready. That, again, did not attract and so, in June, she had to close the theatre after suffering a serious loss.

This was partially recouped, however, by successful provincial tours during which she produced *The Good Hope*, Christopher St. John's version of the play by the Dutch dramatist Heijermans. This morbid tragedy of life at a small fishing port was a success in the provinces which was rather surprising. I have a distinct memory of it myself and I know that the main impression it made upon me was one of the deepest depression and of surprise in seeing Miss Terry clumping about the stage in sabots and voluminous petticoats as an old sea wife. It was the first time in her life that she had played the part of an old woman and to me it seemed an appalling sacrifice in the cause of Art. This, the adorable, joyous Ellen Terry? It seemed impossible. But so to conceal the natural radiance was certainly evidence of her powers as an actress and proof that they were much wider than even her greatest admirers were prepared to admit.

Later on, there came further opportunity for her to show the range of her style in parts more suitable to her delightful personality, and it must have been pleasant to her to know that two of them were designed particularly for her by leading playwrights of the day.

The first was in *Alice Sit-by-the-Fire* by J. M. Barrie, staged by Charles Frohman during the famous season at the Duke of York's Theatre in 1905. This comedy about the imaginative girl who, fed on drawing-room melodrama, imagines that her mother must have a lover and does her lurid best to prevent her from compromising her reputation, might have proved offensive if it had been written by one less competent than Barrie and less endowed with his whimsical spirit. Irene Vanbrugh was the daughter, and Ellen Terry impersonated the mother (who enters into the joke and humours the girl's odd fancies) with her merry spontaneous buoyancy. Miss Terry was enchanted with the part when Barrie described it to her but, she wrote later, "I believe he told it better than he wrote it. He thought he had got a lot of *me* into the part and Alice was certainly endowed with many of my ways, my way of carrying a large bag, crammed full of letters and odds and ends, about with me everywhere, for example. I knew how many personal friends of mine were in the audience when I played the part by the

amount of laughter there was at the line, 'If you don't know what is in that bag, you don't know your mother!'"

She was much praised for her performance but she was never happy in the part, "perhaps because, although it had been made to measure, it didn't fit me. I sometimes felt that I was bursting at the seams! I was accustomed to broader work in a larger theatre."

The second part was that of Lady Cecily Waynflete in *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* which Shaw wrote for her and in which—though not the first to play the role—she gave an enchanting performance at the Court Theatre in 1906. But that event was overshadowed by the celebration—or rather series of celebrations—of her stage jubilee, for it was on April 28, 1856, that she had played the part of the infant Mamilius in *A Winter's Tale* at the Princess's Theatre.

Never was there such a succession of celebrations in honour of an actress—but then no actress had ever before so firmly held the affection of the masses and no other actress had ever graced the stage for so long with such distinction to her profession.

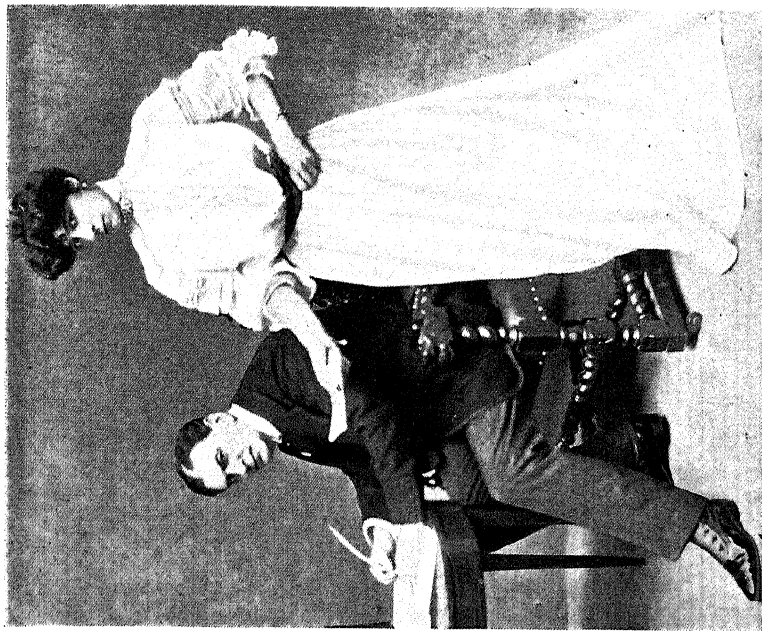
On the actual anniversary, which happened during the run of *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, she appeared in the small part of Francisca at a matinee performance at the Adelphi of *Measure for Measure*. Later, while she was appearing during the Shakesperean Festival at His Majesty's Theatre in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Tree contrived for her a charming celebration. On this occasion Ellen Terry was, as one critic wrote, "The crown and centre of a happy-go-lucky frolic, looking as though fifty years of stage life were to come and had not yet passed over her head." Another said, "She waltzed and skipped and glided over the boards the incarnate spirit of merry mischief."

What followed had, of course, been carefully rehearsed though it had the air of spontaneous tribute. There was an epilogue to the Shakesperean comedy which had been written by Louis N. Parker. Tree as Falstaff appeared, addressing Ellen Terry in such words as these :

Stop, mistress, stop! Our Will has had his way
But now you're in my house and I can say
What Shakespeare never thought of in his play.
Stand here, dear sister-artiste, Britain's pride,
The Genius of her stage personified.
Queenlike, pathetic, tragic, tender, merry—



LENA ASHWELL in *Leah Kleschna*, New Theatre, 1905.



ARTHUR BOURCHIER and VIOLET VANBRUGH in
The Walls of Jericho, Garrick Theatre, 1904.



F. R. BENSON in *The Taming of the Shrew*, 1906.



MRS. PATRICK CAMPBELL and SARAH BERNHARDT in *Pelleas et Melisande*, Vaudeville Theatre, 1904.



WILSON BARRETT in *The Christian King*, Adelphi Theatre, 1902.



MATHESON LANG as John Storm in *The Christian*, Lyceum Theatre, 1907.

O rare, O sweet, O wondrous Ellen Terry.
For us your comrades who unresting give
Our toil to make the plays of Shakespeare live,
What can we do but bow before the art
Which probes even Shakespeare to his very heart,
And summon to our half-bewildered ken
Ophelia, Juliet, Portia, Imogen,
Beatrice, Katharine or, with thoughts of death,
The conscience-stricken Queen of grim Macbeth.
Nor in the glittering catalogue let not
The dreams of later authors be forgot :
Ibsen, Dubourg, Wills, Barrie, Bernard Shaw—
You make the bricks while they supply the straw.

And then, after more such pleasing fancies :

Roll, drums ! And flourish trumpets ! Let the cheers
Many a long day re-echo in your ears !
But, through their clamour, may my whisper move you :
We praise you, we admire you and—we love you.

In accordance with the stage directions Miss Terry dutifully assumed an air of surprise and confusion—but who can believe that it was entirely assumed ? There came a flourish of trumpets and she exclaimed “ O, Mr. Tree—I—cannot find a word——” Down from the sky flew a dove bearing in its beak the script of her speech, a pretty speech which she spoke with obvious emotion. What a flood of memories must have passed through her mind at that moment.

To the applause of the audience she read her thanks “ through tear-dimmed eyes ”. According to the script Tree kissed her hand ceremoniously “ as though endeavouring to hide a life-long love ” and there was much other happily contrived business, as pleasing to the spectator as to Miss Terry herself.

Then came a deputation from the Playgoers’ Club with a silver casket as a presentation which she acknowledged in a few words touched with apt references to *The Merchant of Venice* and recalling the fact that she and Irving were to have been publicly honoured together that year.

The culmination of the celebrations was the great matinee at Drury Lane Theatre, a whole-hearted, warm-hearted tribute from the theatrical profession in which not only nearly every leading actor and actress on the English stage took part but such foreign

representatives as Duse, Mme Réjane, the Coquelins and Caruso, supported with their presence.

It lasted for five and a half hours and was representative of every phase of dramatic art, for it included among other things a nigger minstrel show in which practically every leading comedian appeared, and a performance of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Trial by Jury*, with what must have been the largest and most distinguished cast it has ever known.

There was a great roar of applause when Ellen Terry made her entrance in the first act of *Much Ado About Nothing*. No fewer than twenty-two members of the Terry family were in the cast, including her brother Fred and her sisters Marion, Minnie and Kate.

"It seemed a joke", wrote E. A. Baughan in the *Daily News*, "that this beautiful creature with her quick intelligence and speaking animation of gesture should be celebrating her fiftieth year on the stage. Beatrice was always one of Ellen Terry's best parts in the old days. . . . Miss Terry is not merely a Beatrice of quick verbal repartee but a Beatrice whose mercurial nature feels as well as speaks the witticisms which so confound and enslave Benedick. No man could help but fall in love with this woman whose high spirits and keen enjoyment of life make her perverse."

It was altogether a very moving occasion, particularly when Lady Bancroft introduced her to the audience at the final tableau when she was the central figure on a stage crowded with hundreds of the most illustrious personalities of the profession, united to do her honour. The matinee produced for her a fund of £6,000.

"It was a joyful occasion for me and I believe I played Beatrice as joyfully as at any time in my life," she wrote. "'Out of question you were born in a merry hour.' I felt this to be true of me, and that there was something appropriate in there being no sadness of farewell on this commencement of my jubilee. I was being fêted not as a veteran on the retired list, but as an actress still able to serve the public."

That was true. Ellen Terry was still beautiful. There was still the old magic in her voice and her powers of comedy were unimpaired. As a leading actress she was destined to outlive the Edwardian era in full activity and prosperity and to create further parts in the maturity of her art.

It was a charming idea that she should appear in September 1906 in *A Winter's Tale*, at His Majesty's Theatre, for that was the play in which, as Mamilus, she had made her stage début fifty years

before. She appeared as Hermione, a part for which she was not naturally suited for she had won her way into the hearts of British playgoers by the radiant warmth of her sunny nature, by sweet womanliness and her conquering smile, qualities hardly required for the part. But, as the *Daily Chronicle* wrote: "Most certainly everything that grace, sympathy, instinct, womanliness and sheer genius could do for Hermione, Miss Ellen Terry achieves. In the early homelier scenes, as hostess and mother the exquisite buoyancy, naturalness and queenliness of her Hermione simply irradiated the whole theatre."

What gracious tributes were paid to her in that momentous year of her jubilee.

A. B. Walkley wrote in *The Times*: "She is at her best when she has to laugh—just where most actresses are at their worst. Who can think of her Beatrice without smiling at the recollection of those delicious quips that used to come bubbling, as it seemed, into words before she knew that she had said them? And the raillery of her Portia, how fresh and delicate it was! She is the perfect image of the witty woman, always charming, always gracious."

How truly J. T. Grein summed up her wonderful charm and attraction. "Hers is the exceptional gift of captivation. Her winsome womanliness, her smile expressive of a multitude of sweet thoughts, the charm of her voice and her movements—they all harmonise in that unspeakable something which appeals to woman, man and child. Besides, unlike other great stars that shine in the firmament of the theatre, she is entirely free from artifice. . . . She is spontaneous—she is natural. She is always herself—which defines her possibilities and her limitations. By instinct and endowment Ellen Terry is a comedienne. Her destiny was to sow gladness, to comfort our heartstrings, to smooth the furrows of care."

VII

TREE AND HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE

WHEN SIR HENRY IRVING DIED, THE POSITION OF LEADER of the English stage fell to Sir Herbert Tree, or Beerbohm Tree as he was then known. There never was any question about the succession. No one among the actor-managers of the day was so equipped to become the spokesman and dominating personality of the theatre; no one could have filled the role with such authority.

Apart from his gifts as an actor, as producer and theatre manager, he was an extraordinary, many-sided and original personality who, one thinks, would have made his name in any other sphere of life had he not at an early age chosen the stage as his profession. With his tall, willowy form, his fair reddish hair, his vividly blue eyes—they were the most striking of his features—his firm chin and his intellectual forehead, he was as striking in his appearance off-stage as in any of the roles he created. One would not have described him as actorish or Bohemian yet he had a certain flamboyance which was essentially that of the profession. He was a wit and an epigrammatist, delightful and whimsical as a talker, a man of taste and culture, something of a *poseur* and *dilettante* who, one feels, had many sides to his character which were never fully developed. His enthusiasms ran in many directions and were often checked by fresh impulses. Somehow or other he always conveyed the air of being an amateur rather than a professional actor. He would take up a part and play it with superb force, but often, inspired by some fresh idea or affected by some new enthusiasm, he would give it a new twist or even allow it to decline into an indifferent performance. There was a certain instability about him, a lack of concentration and self-discipline and so he gained many detractors who would not admit his greatness as an actor. He was, in short, an extraordinary blend of dreamer, idealist and man of action.

But his achievements, if only those accomplished within the limits of the Edwardian period at His Majesty's Theatre, certainly entitle him to be regarded as a great actor with an extraordinary range of style and variety who made every production the cause of

discussion and an event of exceptional excitement. A Beerbohm Tree first-night—we have had nothing quite like it since his day, nor have we had any similar personality capable of inspiring a theatrical event with such intensity of interest.

It must be admitted that, as an actor, Tree had his limitations. He was certainly not a good interpreter of parts requiring ardour and passion but he could express tenderness and sentiment extremely well. He was at his best, as W. L. Courtney once wrote, “in the representation of fantastic, eccentric, bizarre characters with a twist in them which made them peculiarly original”. In any part that required flourish, extravagance or a touch of the grotesque he was unmatched. He was less successful as the straightforward character of drawing-room comedy. He often assumed parts that were beyond his range. He could be sentimental, humorous, bizarre and florid but he had not the large heroic manner, the physique or voice for such parts as Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

“He was essentially a romantic actor,” wrote Desmond McCarthy, “perhaps the last exuberant descendant of Romanticism flowering on the English stage. . . . But if he was pre-eminently a romantic the next thing to note about him is that he was a character actor; and it was in the exercise of this side of his talent that his subtlety showed itself. A character actor is one who does not excel chiefly in playing certain recurring situations but in building up before our eyes a definite human being. Tree possessed the power of conceiving character in a very high degree. Of all his contemporaries he had the largest share of this author’s gift. But an actor must, of course, also possess the faculty of representing the characters he understands. His gift of conceiving character may, as it does in dramatists and authors, outrun his power of representing it to the eye and ear, which power is limited in the case of every actor to his temperament and physique.

“In the case of Herbert Tree his power of understanding character was far wider than his power of representing it; and his extraordinary skill in making-up, in which he was unmatched, often tempted him to play characters which were outside his temperamental and physical range. He had not the animal vigour which is necessary to great excellence in violent tragedy or in robust comedy. He could make himself look like Falstaff; he understood and revelled in the character of Falstaff but his performance lacked fundamental force. Hence the contradiction of his acting; his performance as a whole often fell short of high excellence, yet

these same impersonations were lit by insight and masterly strokes of interpretation, which made the spectator feel that he was watching the performance of the most imaginative of living actors. He had understood the character marvellously well. The same phenomenon would occur in parts in which the actor himself had put practically nothing. . . . Sometimes when the sentiment of his parts was subtle he succeeded with an ease and completeness which, owing to the absence of emphasis, seemed often to escape the notice of critics ; sometimes when it was crude he was apt to intensify its crudeness by abandoning himself to it utterly and this did not escape them."

Tree was forty-eight years of age when Edward came to the throne and, having made his first professional appearance in 1878, had long been established as a leading actor. He had already appeared in the most striking role of his career, that of Svengali in *Trilby*, Paul Potter's adaptation of Du Maurier's novel, the profits of which had enabled him to build Her (afterwards His) Majesty's Theatre, up to that time one of the most resplendent homes of the drama in London and a notable centre of fashionable theatre-going. It was a theatre which never ceased to excite his admiration. The pride with which he regarded it was almost childlike. His daughter, Viola, recalled with amusement the fact that on her wedding day, when he was taking her to the church, he ordered the coachman to drive out of his way so that he might have a glimpse of his beloved building which to him was much more than a handsome theatre. It was a temple dedicated to Art and he was its owner.

Trilby, originally produced in 1895, proved an unfailing stand-by to Tree for many years. He revived it during the Edwardian reign and frequently toured with it.

Can one ever forget him as he appeared in the part of the strange, evil character "from out of the mysterious East" who, by hypnotic power, exercised his will upon poor, hapless Trilby, the divinely formed artist's model? With his genius for make-up he brought Du Maurier's own drawings to life.

Few characters that I have ever seen upon the stage live so vividly in my memory as that tall, sinister figure with the uncombed greasy black hair, the straggling, untidy raven-black beard, the tattered frock-coat, the air of romantic shabbiness and picturesque grime, who, with guttural alien accent—the very tones of which struck a chill—and outlandish posturings, brought such an

uncomfortable and disturbing suggestion of menace into the happy studio of the Bohemian artists.

It was a masterpiece of eerie, bizarre fantasy, a superb realisation of every evil and grotesque quality with which Du Maurier endowed his picture of fantastic villainy. I have since seen revivals of the play but no Svengali in my experience has managed to convey anything like the floridity, the mocking, insolent assurance, the swagger, the half-veiled animosity, the odious conceit, that Tree expressed. It was, without doubt, the most outstanding part of his career and, as a piece of character acting, has rarely been bettered by any other actor in whatever creation.

Tree was not one of those actors who lived by giving stereotyped variations of the same kind of role. He abhorred the very suggestion of repetition and monotony. The variety of his productions was extraordinary. No other actor-manager has ever displayed such a range. Shakespearian plays, adaptations of novels new and old, adaptations of foreign successes, the poetic drama, plays that lent themselves to pageantry and imposing stage spectacle—all these, with Tree abounding in roles that enabled him to disguise himself with all the aids of wiggery and make-up, gave excitement to every theatrical season.

The list of Tree's productions indicates that the range of his interest in the drama was far more extensive and enterprising than that of any of his rivals. In the period between 1901 and 1910 they included not only a great deal of Shakespeare but such plays as *Resurrection* (founded upon the Tolstoy novel), *Oliver Twist*, Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, Hall Caine's *The Eternal City*, *Colonel Newcome*, *Faust*, *Beethoven*, *The Last of the Dandies*, *Business is Business* (*Les Affaires sont les Affaires*), *The Darling of the Gods*, as well as Stephen Phillips's *Nero* and *Ulysses*.

Such plays offered a rich variety of parts for him—a gallery of portraits of sharply defined characters as varied and extensive as any actor has ever undertaken during the whole of his career.

To look back upon his record is to be surprised at his energy in the creation of parts. By present-day standards his plays did not achieve long runs and so every year he was engaged constantly in new and expensive productions. Consider, for instance, what he presented in 1908.

First came *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, an adaptation of the Dickens novel by J. Comyns Carr who made of it a piece of lurid melodrama not more satisfactory as a play than most dramatisations

of the novelist's works. Tree appeared as Jasper, the villain of the piece, a flamboyant study somewhat in the vein of Svengali.

Next came his Parigot in *The Beloved Vagabond*, the dramatised version of W. J. Locke's novel which was the current rage. This part was after Tree's own heart and his conception of the character was just as the reader imagined it to be—Parigot with his Bohemian scorn of respectability, his love of the open road, of café life and comradeship, his Gascon floridity and exaggeration of speech, his carefree humour. This phase of the character—he missed something of the romantic fervour in the earlier part—was a delight from beginning to end.

He followed this with Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, a performance which, it was said, dwarfed those of all the rest of the cast. As one critic remarked he was realistic where Irving was romantic yet the part was instinct with the sufferings and sorrows and passions of the Jewish people.

Lastly there was *Faust*, in the construction of which Stephen Phillips had been helped by Comyns Carr. As a spectacle and presentation of scenic grandeur it was one of the greatest triumphs of Tree's management. The Brocken scene with its rugged rocks and precipices, its witches flitting from peak to peak, its clouds of smoke fitfully illumined by flames and its awe-inspiring earthquake was a striking piece of stage illusion out-distancing anything attempted by Irving in earlier days.

But the drama was swamped completely by the setting and the poetry was tame and uninspired compared with that of *Herod* and *Nero*. The best that can be said of it is that it was an improvement upon the fustian stuff of Wills's version of the drama presented by Irving.

Tree, however, was an impressive figure as Mephistopheles though his conception of the part was that of a super-showman revelling in the presentation of supernatural conjuring tricks and illusion. But it was the sort of character he loved to play and one can imagine how much the sardonic humour of the part appealed to him.

Note the contrasts and the variety presented in this range of character parts.

It is hard to say in which, among his long list of roles, he most excelled. Of those in which I saw him I much preferred his Svengali and many of those who, more fortunate than I, had seen him in most of them, have been of the same opinion. But so many

critics, so many different opinions. Apart from a few acknowledged failures—most of them in Shakesperean roles which he would have been well advised not to undertake—practically every one of them found its particular champion.

His Richard II, in the production of 1903, was particularly admired. "This is a character", wrote one critic, "that suits Mr. Tree to perfection. The curious blend of the man of shrinking effeminacy and philosophic irony, the dreamy languor interrupted by crises of feverish excitement, the yearning for affection and the bouts of half-crazy speculation—all these things the actor brings out with such completeness as to make his Richard probably the most haunting figure he has yet given us."

Another praised him for showing "the conscious courteousness of Richard, his flashy imperiousness, the delicacy of his untrustworthy nature, his exquisite gentleness, his spiteful arrogance so inconsistent with it, his theatrical humility and his rapid transitions of mood", summing up his impressions by saying that the role could never have found a better interpreter.

There was his remarkable study of Theodore Izard, the shifty ex-convict Jewish financier in *Business is Business*, Sydney Grundy's adaptation of Octave Mirbeau's play, produced in 1905. This was less a play than an elaborately detailed study of a cynical and very unsympathetic character. "All the details of the man—his coarse humour, the loud self-satisfied laugh, his faith in the power of money, his affection for his caddish son, are touched on by Tree with masterly skill," wrote one critic, and such praise was echoed by many other writers.

In the same year came *Oliver Twist*, in which Tree, exhibiting another example of his taste for weird character, played Fagin, a grim, sardonic piece of acting, "a very nightmare of lurid villainy to haunt one's dreams, an achievement in the sphere of the bizarre and fantastic world", as one critic said of it.

Tree had his notable failures. He suffered a good deal from the weakness of some of his playwrights. Time after time, sad to say, he lavished beauty of production upon unworthy material and wasted his imagination and creative powers in building up of character in plays of flimsy value. No doubt his judgment was frequently at fault. It was often enough that the play lent itself to superb stage spectacle, to beautiful costumes, to some new and unexploited phase of romantic picturesqueness, and that it provided him with the opportunity of representing a striking leading figure.

An instance in point was Clyde Fitch's *The Last of the Dandies*, in 1901. This, with its reproduction of fashionable life in the forties and of the Lady Blessington set, appealed to his artistic taste and he provided it with lavish settings. It was a series of magnificent, glowing and bejewelled tableaux and of modish splendour, presented with every care of detail. But the figures in it were little more than extravagantly dressed dummies. There was no sustained story and as a picture of the Count d'Orsay of history it was fantastic, fictional, unconvincing and dramatically negligible. It represented the Count merely as a contemptible beau, a vain, overdressed creature absorbed in matters of personal adornment and endowed with nothing of the reputed d'Orsay wit. It was a mere shell of a part. Pictorially it appealed to the eye, but though Tree looked the very embodiment of elegance and distinction he could give no semblance of real life to the character. Unfortunately, although the cast included Lily Hanbury, Lily Brayton and Mrs. Tree, it fell almost entirely to him to sustain the interest of the play. No actor could have done more in such a piece of decorative nonsense.

His cold, repentant Nekludoff in *Resurrection* was praised; so, too, were his dignified Wolsey in *Henry VIII* and his fantastic Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*. His Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra* came in for a good deal of adverse criticism, as did such other Shakesperean parts as Benedick and Macbeth. He was praised for his remarkable performance as Zakkuri, the crafty, implacable Samurai chieftain in *The Darling of the Gods* (1903), for his touching study of the afflicted composer in *Beethoven* (1909). His virtuosity found full opportunity in Stephen Phillips's *Nero* (1906). "No one can doubt that Mr. Tree has a very keen—one might also say a sympathetic realisation of the character of Nero," wrote William Archer. "At all events he throws himself with infinite gusto into the character of the æsthete-megalomaniac, the autocrat who is convinced that he has an artistic mission (as others believe in their religious or political calling or election) and who makes it an excuse for every sort of cruelty and crime. He plays the part with extraordinary picturesqueness and subtlety of detail. The limitations of his performance are the limitations of his voice and method."

Other critics wrote in a similar vein. In fact there were few occasions when those who had to judge Tree's acting did not temper their praise with some such criticism. But there was unanimity when, in 1906, he produced *Colonel Newcome*, a far from

satisfactory version of Thackeray's novel. The play, indeed, was a poor thing but it was redeemed by what *The Stage* described as "one of his most interesting and finished performances" as the Colonel.

Of the pathetic final scene at the Greyfriars in which the frail Colonel answers to the last roll-call, Wilfred Whitten wrote: "Mr. Tree has portrayed many and terrible emotions, from the blood-madness of Nero to the cold, sustained atonement of the hero in Tolstoy's *Resurrection*. The great actor has interpreted intense and monstrous moments of genius, of horror, of fatality, of fear; but one may hazard that at the end, as he looks back, there will seem to be but one supreme moment amongst them all, the moment in which as Col. Newcome he exclaims 'Adsum' for the last time."

Archer described it as, in some ways, the ablest thing he had ever done. "As a visual, physical embodiment it is quite perfect," he wrote. "Doyle's immortal drawings seem to have come to life. Such, and no other, was Thomas Newcome in his habit as he lived. It must be said, too, that he plays the part with becoming simplicity. He subordinates himself to the character, instead of intruding his own inventions between the author and the audience. He plays with dignity, with restraint, with feeling."

That was one of Tree's most happily inspired parts, one to which he devoted the whole of his enthusiastic mind. There were others in which his acting undoubtedly suffered because of the attendant anxieties as manager and producer. Here, one is forced to admit, is one of the drawbacks and perils of the actor-manager system.

Reviewing the production of *Antony and Cleopatra* Archer wrote: "Had he the qualifications of John Kemble and Edmund Kean rolled into one it would be absolutely impossible for him to do himself justice with the whole weight of a huge production on his shoulders. How can he possibly think out his part while he is inventing, arranging, adjusting and regulating this vast machine? How can he throw his whole soul into the imaginative effort of impersonation while his mind is distracted by a thousand anxieties and cares of detail? The system that places the management of a great theatre in the hands of the leading actor is not a good one, but it must be admitted that the intellectual effort involved in actor-management on the great scale is wonderful and, in its way, admirable."

Again, E. A. Baughan wrote: "You cannot attend one of Mr. Beerbohm Tree's rehearsals without being struck by his

wonderful powers of imaginative stage-management, or (should I say ?) pictorial management for the two things are not quite the same. Mr. Tree is gifted with a vivid and intense imagination and the indulgence of this quality is quite a fad with him. He carries it to the extent of dwarfing himself and the rest of the company as players.

“At the same time Mr. Tree’s lavish productions have a special value of their own—a poetic as well as an historic value. Nor do they retard the progress of the drama, as the literary critics assume. Were *Antony and Cleopatra* performed without scenery it would be possible, of course, to make scene follow scene with almost the rapidity of a bioscope, but the result would be inexpressibly confusing to the audience. But when an actor-manager superintends such superb spectacles as Mr. Tree puts on the stage, and at the same time is interested in the financial results of the enterprise, he is taking up a burden which is heavy enough for one man. In addition to this, Mr. Tree is his own principal actor. No wonder he is seldom letter perfect at the beginning of a production, and produces the impression of not concentrating himself on the character he is impersonating.”

One cannot help speculating as to what heights Tree might have risen as an actor had his mind and his unquenchable energy not been diverted by his functions as manager and producer. But it was not in his nature to subdue his enthusiasms and impulses. He had a passion for elaborate stage decorations. His artistic mind revelled in the opportunity to heap upon the stage rich and glittering fabrics and to load it with every detail of luxury and extravagance. The ample proportions of his theatre enabled him to give full play to such Byzantine splendours and elaborate effects, done on a scale in which expense seemed to have been disregarded.

It was after his death that Lady Tree wrote : “How he loved to try and bring woods and streams and founts and skies and mountains on to the stage ! And pillared palaces and long-drawn aisles, stately castles, grim battlements, battlefields, pine forests, beech woods, fields jewelled with daisies and yellow sands ! Who has striven towards all these so lovingly, so persistently ? Herbert condescended to ‘curtains’ for a brief space in the course of his career—but he hung them to prejudice, not to conviction. He knew perfectly well that the writer of plays, be he Pinero or Shakespeare, requires—nay demands—everything that the art of the stage can do for him.”

To his production of *Richard II* Tree gave everything that colour, music and spectacle could provide. It was a gorgeous series of pictures, of costumes, armour and of Plantagenet pomp. The architectural beauty and solidity of the castle, the sweep of heather-clad hills, the spaciousness of the tournament lists, caused gasps of admiration. He filled the stage with admirably drilled crowds, and specialists had been consulted to secure absolute accuracy in heraldry, ceremonial and costumes.

Much Ado About Nothing (1905), in which Tree played Benedick, was remarkable for its pictorial splendour, its interludes of music and dance, its striking harmonies of colour and ingenious stage effects which, as one critic remarked, made the production the rival of Gaiety extravaganza. One of the prettiest of Tree's fancies was the introduction of a long intermezzo showing the passing of the night in Leonato's garden. Nightingales sang, birds twittered at dawn and cocks crowed. Such a pleasant interpolation was all very well but it was quite irrelevant and it got in the way of the comedy. As the *Illustrated London News* commented, "No manager can be blamed for making Shakespeare thoroughly entertaining but the question remains whether Mr. Tree in his laudable anxiety to do his best for his author has not sometimes on the smallest authority over-elaborated his illustrations."

The Tempest (1904), in which Tree strangely chose to play Caliban, was described by one critic as a mixture of spectacle, music, ballet and pantomime.

A description of one of his settings—"before the shepherd's cottage" in *A Winter's Tale*—will give a further idea of the photographic realism of the stage pictures which he inspired.

"To the left as one faces the stage is the old hut, a sweep of green turf leads on from the doorway and, also to the left, a glade runs away through delicate walls of cool leaves. To the right is a sweep of water, backed by trees and mountains. Stepping-stones at the nearer end of the lake take the place of the more ordinary bridge and one sees little rivulets forcing their way through the green bank and losing themselves amid masses of moss and ferns. When the red-coated clown, leading his donkey, confronts the ragged Autolycus the picture is an exquisite one indeed."

Another glimpse of the same production: "The Sicilian and Bohemian courts where fumes of incense curl round golden statues of Apollo, and white-coated priests chant ancient dirges, and helmets flash and bare-armed maidens hover round golden couches—these

are wonders of design. There is, too, the scene in the judgment hall with which the first act is made to conclude, and in which chaste Hermione defends herself against the charges of her jealous husband Leontes."

As was once said of him, "He fell in love with magnificence, and it was magnificence that ran to designs with extravagant detail." He had followed in the tradition of Irving who had set the example of elaborate production of Shakesperean plays and, in the matter of extravagance and decoration, Tree improved upon him.

The reaction against this ornate realism had not yet come, and the public expected magnificence from him. In giving them what it expected, Tree was inspired by high ideals. That a great play should be adorned by the finest of settings that the designer, the scenic artist and stage machinist could devise was his tribute to Shakespeare.

In justice to Tree it should be remembered that his method of presentation, like that of Irving, was prompted largely as a protest against tawdry and indifferent productions and that it was owing to the artistic taste of his stagings, the beauty and the pageantry, that Shakespeare was popularised among the public.

Though there were then a few who scoffed at this elaborate realism and super-decoration—they were largely those who, one thinks, would rather have seen Shakespeare neglected than Shakespeare adorned—he had the admiring support of some of the leading critics of the day, all of them by no means men lacking in taste. Commenting on a Shakesperean production, a writer in the *Daily Chronicle* said: "It could not but remind one to how great an extent our present stage has to be grateful to Mr. Tree for driving Shakespeare home to the hearts of the greater public by every means in his power. It was refreshing to see that amid all the prevailing vogue of picture-postcard prettiness and brainless sensuality, a huge theatre like His Majesty's will still crowd itself to the doors and shout itself hoarse over an earnestly acted and carefully produced Shakesperean comedy."

"The public expects this kind of elaboration from Mr. Tree and would doubtless be unhappy if Shakespeare's plays were produced in a simpler way at His Majesty's," wrote E. A. Baughan, "and there is so much magnificence and taste in the staging of *A Winter's Tale* that even those who object to unnecessary detail will readily forgive Mr. Tree for his characteristic exuberance of magnificence."

A similar view was expressed by a critic who saw *Richard II* and who said: "As one sat and pondered over each scene, and tried to realise the amount of thought it meant, the intimate knowledge it required to produce such a series of perfect *ensembles*, the more one was disposed to thank heaven that one had a manager who was so obviously indifferent to the silver so long as he could present what he considered a striking picture of the times."

Since those days there has been the reaction against the presentation of Shakespeare in the style and on the scale of Irving and Tree and one is inclined to think that in the admiration for austere productions, decorated—if that is the right word—with dingy curtains, bare platforms and ill-disguised packing-cases, the contribution of Tree, if not scorned, has been forgotten.

How unjust to his memory are the literary-minded gentlemen (few of them conspicuous for their support of the theatre) who, dolefully wailing against the supposed neglect of Shakespeare, have wilfully chosen to ignore the fact that, apart from his frequent productions, Tree, in 1905, inaugurated his series of Shakesperean festivals at His Majesty's, presenting (and acting in all of them himself) *Richard II*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Twelfth Night*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Julius Caesar*. Year after year during the Edwardian reign they went on, always presented with casts of great distinction.

However, Tree was not without recognition in his own time. "Twenty years ago," wrote J. T. Grein during one such festival, "such celebration would have been called absurd and have excited the comment that somebody had much money to lose. Ten years ago it would still have been deemed speculative, honourable yet distinctly hazardous. To-day, however, there exists no longer any doubt. Shakespeare has laid his hold firmly on our public, and the festival at His Majesty's is not merely a graceful act of reverence but one that earns its own and well-deserved reward.

"Following in the wake of his elder [Irving] Mr. Tree, ever active, resourceful and energetic, took up the Shakespeare cult and, practically from the beginning of its history, His Majesty's Theatre stood out as a stronghold of our most national drama. And Mr. Tree was by no means a second to the Chief of the profession. He very soon made an attempt to surpass him. First of all he perfected the casts and gather round him the best available actors of the day. Nearly every actor of repute, save actor-managers, has appeared under Mr. Tree's banner at His Majesty's—and some—

I think of Mr. Lewis Waller and Miss Constance Collier—immensely advanced their position by this connection. But with equal lavishness Mr. Tree showered his bounties on the magnificence of the display and at times the spectacle became so dazzling to the eye and so deafening to the ear that we had to protest against the flood which threatened to submerge both the drama and the actors.

“For all that, this picture of extreme luxury attained its end and had peculiar consequences. Not only does a Shakespeare play at His Majesty’s Theatre mean what is commercially and sportively called ‘a dead certainty’ for many months, but recently the most artistic stage manager of Germany paid Mr. Tree the great and significant compliment of producing *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* on the avowedly identical lines as at His Majesty’s Theatre. That would imply that in influential quarters in other countries the adornment of Shakespeare is not considered so detrimental as the defenders of Elizabethan methods contend. To Mr. Tree, next to Sir Henry Irving, belongs the honour of having naturalised Shakespeare in his own country and of having redeemed England from the taunt that the real appreciation of Shakespeare was found and ‘made in Germany’.”

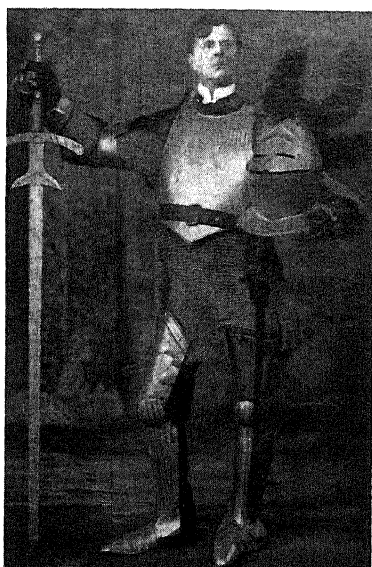
There is no doubt that Tree as actor, manager and producer, made a notable contribution to the history of the British stage and that the best of his work was accomplished during the Edwardian period. What were his positive contributions to the theatre? Let W. L. Courtney provide the answer.

Tree, he wrote, “produced plays with extreme care for detail and many appeals to the eye. There never was anything slipshod either in the method of stage representation or in the attention paid to what diplomats call the imponderabilia. Indeed it was the care taken over the minutiae which guaranteed the effectiveness of the whole. Thanks in especial to Irving and Tree London stage-production reached a higher level of completeness and finish than was to be seen in foreign capitals. . . . Gradually Tree bettered the examples of his predecessors. His critics said he over-elaborated his effects; his friends never tired of welcoming new grades of beauty.

“I take only two instances out of many which offer themselves in recollection. Probably there never was a more beautiful stage picture than Olivia’s pleasaunce in *Twelfth Night*. We talk of the hanging gardens of Babylon as of something legendary and rare. Here before our eyes were to be seen Olivia’s hanging gardens,



HILDA TREVELYAN and GERALD DU MAURIER in *What Every Woman Knows*, Duke of York's Theatre, 1908.



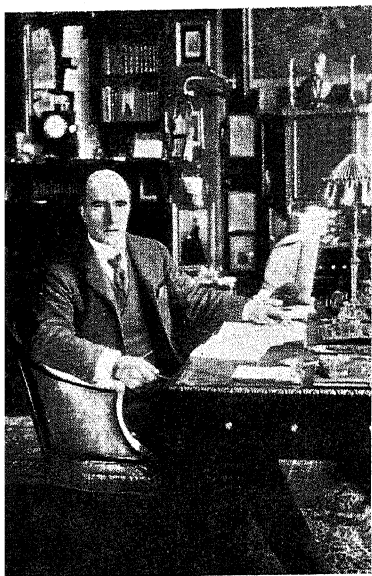
JAMES WELCH in *When Knights Were Bold*, Wyndham's Theatre, 1907.



MARIE TEMPEST and LEONARD BOYNE in *The Marriage of Kitty*, Duke of York's Theatre, 1902.



MARION TERRY and CHARLES WYNDHAM in *Captain Drew on Leave*, New Theatre, 1905.



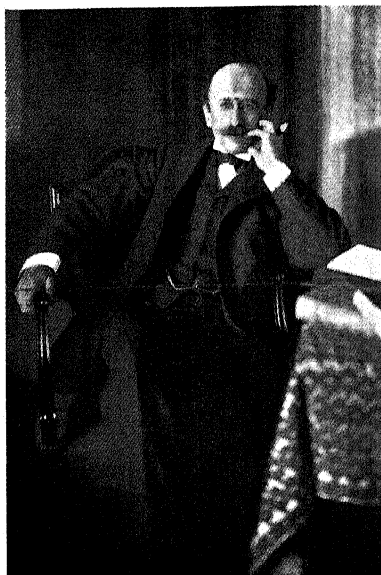
ARTHUR WING PINERO.



HENRY ARTHUR JONES.



BERNARD SHAW.



ALFRED SUTRO.

a dream of exquisite and appealing beauty which seemed to bring out the more clearly by contrast the vulgarity and coarseness of Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, while it enhanced the delicacy of Viola and Olivia herself.

"The other example I will take from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. You will recall that though the scene is supposed to be laid in the neighbourhood of Athens, the feeling, the atmosphere of the play belong essentially to Stratford and England. Accordingly Tree gave us alternately with some marble seats and olive trees, splendid glimpses of British forests in which the fairies ran wild and Bottom and his companions rehearsed their uncouth theatricals. Anything more restful to the eye than these glades of sylvan beauty I have never seen on any stage. . . . But, indeed, the time would fail me if I were to recount half the wonders which the magician Tree displayed before our eyes in play after play."

Tree, added the writer, "did not forget the higher obligations of the position he had attained. He was full of the idea of the importance of theatrical art, as a main instrument of culture and as a most necessary element of civic and social life."

Tree, indeed did great service to the stage and, it should be added, to his profession. He loved the limelight and the centre of the stage, it is true, but he gave great opportunities to his fellow actors and actresses. Many of the most brilliant artistes of his day were proud to act with him. And it was he, it should not be forgotten, who, in 1904, founded the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. There have been few actors who, in many-sided genius and in personality, have compared with him, and certainly none since his day as leaders of the stage.

VIII

ALEXANDER AND OTHER ACTOR-MANAGERS

IT IS NO SLIGHT UPON THE MEMORY OF TREE TO SAY THAT WHILE, because of the remarkable and changing nature of his productions, he attracted the Edwardian playgoer to the play, his fellow actor-manager, George Alexander, drew them particularly to the actor.

Alexander was, above all, a matinee idol with a devoted following. With his clear-cut features, his silvery hair, his air of good breeding and authority, he was as handsome an actor as ever adorned the stage, and he attracted crowds of admirers. He rarely disguised his distinctive good looks with make-up and he was in no sense, like Irving or Tree, a superb character actor. He had no fancy for bizarre roles but there has rarely been a better actor for the fashionable drawing-room comedy.

In acting he had certain mannerisms of speech and gesture, but these were hardly to be regarded as defects for they endeared him to his admirers. The Alexander charm was indeed very attractive and potent. His voice, though slightly nasal, was soothing, its tones caressing and as silvery as his hair, and when he employed it in sentimental passages and in love-making it gave pure delight.

His range as an actor was somewhat restricted, though not so restricted as some critics would have it; but perhaps the most remarkable thing about him was that he excelled as a manager and business-man of the theatre. Wherefore, unlike the majority of actors, he devoted some time to public affairs, performing very useful service on the London County Council of which he was a member for several years.

He was inspired more by deliberation than by impulse. It was this unusual acumen and business sense that enabled him to give the St. James's, which he controlled for so many years, a distinctive place in the theatre. His whole career was brilliant and successful and the best of his work was done during the Edwardian reign.

He had two great guiding qualities—a flair for picking good plays, and a realisation of the importance of selecting an attractive and accomplished leading lady.

As his biographer A. E. W. Mason wrote : " Alexander brought to King Street, St. James's, a fresh point of view and a generous spirit. He planned to build up a theatre of high prestige and financial success upon the foundations of British authorship. To that end he went diligently out in search of authors. Having secured the sympathy and promises of most British playwrights he sought the collaboration of men who had so far never dreamed of writing a play at all. John Davidson, for instance, the poet—alas, so soon forgotten!—Miss Cholmondeley, Conan Doyle, Thomas Hardy, Stephen Phillips and, later on, Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, Quiller Couch, Max Beerbohm, E. V. Lucas, A. E. W. Mason and H. G. Wells."

To which one might add that, without him, Oscar Wilde might never have come to the front, and that it was mainly because of his productions that Pinero gained his fame. The names of Alexander and Pinero, in fact, are linked inseparably. Other playwrights who wrote some of their best plays for him included Haddon Chambers, R. C. Carton, H. V. Esmond, Henry Arthur Jones, Sutro, Anthony Hope, (Mrs.) John Oliver Hobbes, Sydney Grundy, Justin Huntley McCarthy, Comyns Carr, Rudolph Besier and Temple Thurston. Shakespeare, too, was not neglected. It is an impressive list. Well might he say, in looking over his career in later years, " It was upon English playwrights that from first to last I desired to rely for the bulk of my supplies."

Alexander did not always play for safety ; he was gallantly ready to take chances, as, for instance, when he staged Henry James's *Guy Domville*, of painful memory, and Stephen Phillips's early poetic play, *Paolo and Francesca*.

The latter was a courageous venture, and Alexander took the greatest pains in providing for it the most beautiful of Italianate settings. He sent his scene-painter and his stage-manager to Italy to study the architectural background of the thirteenth century, and the frescoes of Cimabue and Giotto in the upper church of Assisi and the old ruined castello.

It was in this production, in 1902, that Alexander gave the very youthful Henry Ainley his first real stage chance. Ainley who had been a bank clerk had made some appearances as an amateur actor, and having been approached for advice Alexander was quick to notice the handsome youth's aptitude. He engaged him to play Paolo, but the début was not an entire success. Ainley's powers were then promising but immature. The part set him on the way to fame.

It was Alexander, much out of his customary line, who was the great success in Phillips's play. As Giovanni, the war-scarred veteran whose affection for his young brother who was to betray him was the one redeeming element in his hard nature, his acting came as a revelation to those who knew him only as the leading man in Wilde and Pinero plays. It was a display of sonorous diction and emotional force.

Alexander had several other notable ventures apart from drawing-room comedy in which he most excelled. In 1902 he appeared as Villon, the vagabond poet in Justin Huntley McCarthy's *If I Were King*, and with his slim figure and (as always) excellent diction he made a notable success in a romantic part. The author took considerable liberties with history, making Villon the godlike hero of cloak-and-sword drama seasoned with humour and sentiment, and Alexander was delightful in every phase of it.

His success in *Old Heidelberg* (1903) came as a delightful surprise. This adaptation from the German was one of the few foreign plays he ever produced. He had originally intended to play the part of the kindly old Dr. Jüttner, the princely hero's tutor, but his friends, even members of his company, as A. E. W. Mason records, persuaded him that he must play the part of the young student Prince Karl Heinrich. Alexander complained that he was over forty but he was persuaded, much against his inclination and largely influenced by his wife. He accordingly gave the part of Jüttner to J. D. Beveridge and played the Prince himself. His advisers were right. His appearance was boyish and so were his bearing and manner. He had the right eagerness, the impulsiveness, the waywardness and the fervour of youth. It was a brilliant success, a triumph of romantic acting by "the stage's most accomplished sentimentalist", as one critic described him.

It was not long afterwards that, leaving the St. James's temporarily to the Kendals, he joined Arthur Collins at Drury Lane Theatre and played the leading role in Hall Caine's *The Prodigal Son*, at a salary of £250 a week, a considerable sum in those days. But the crowning achievement of his twenty-five years of management (and of Pinero's long career as a playwright) was in *His House in Order* which ran from January 13, 1906 to February 27, 1907 and brought him a profit of £23,443.

I shall deal more fully with the play later on, but let me quote at random what two of the critics said about Alexander's acting in the most notable of his productions. He played the part of

Hilary Jesson, a British diplomat who returned to his younger brother's home in time to assume the gallant role of champion to his repressed sister-in-law, so odiously treated by the rigid Ridgeley family.

"The tirade against the Ridgeleys and all their class", said *The Stage*, "is one of the passages calling for effective declamation with which Mr. Alexander deals admirably in a part of the *raisonneur* type. . . . With greying hair as this man of forty-six, Mr. Alexander represents the trained diplomat, with both *finesse* and force; some airy passages in the first act and the great scene in act three, brilliantly played, further aid in making Mr. Alexander's Hilary Jesson one of the best of his performances during the past decade."

William Archer in *The Tribune* wrote: "He (Hilary Jesson) is charmingly drawn and is acted by Mr. George Alexander with perfect distinction, firmness and force. Mr. Pinero has deliberately given Mr. Alexander several of those rhetorical show-pieces in which he excels; in each case he rises superbly to the occasion. Above all, his great speech in the third act produced a profound effect."

The first-night reception of the play was enthusiastic and so were most of the notices. I will not here deal with the fact that later on the play was the subject of much wrangling between the critics, in which William Archer and E. A. Baughan took opposing views as to Pinero's merits as a playwright. I merely state the fact that the play was an enormous success and that Alexander had no cause to worry if the experts differed. It was all good publicity anyway for *His House in Order*.

Later on, Alexander had further successes in *Bella Donna* (by J. B. Fagan from Hichens' novel) by which he gained £25,748, and in Bernstein's *The Thief* which earned £19,460. In Sutro's *John Glayde's Honour* (1907) he had a congenial rhetorical and sentimental part. In Pinero's *The Thunderbolt* (1908) there came the opportunity for a display of hysterical and emotional acting, and in the same year there was Sutro's *The Builder of Bridges*, an artificial and theatrical piece in which he managed to give a performance of authority and earnestness as one of those intensely honourable men of affairs which he could impersonate so well.

There is no doubt that in the matter of stage roles Alexander preferred to appear in that in which he most excelled—that of the *raisonneur* in drawing-room comedy. "In a sense I may claim to have created the Man of Forty," he once said during an interview

later in his career, "that man of the world who looks out on existence, as Thackeray phrased it, from his seat at the club window. It was a character in those days much older than I actually was, but one with which the public evidently thought I was well suited."

"Well suited" was indeed the *mot juste*. Handsome Sir George was in all truth the glass of fashion and the mould of form. He wore his clothes with a grace and an air of distinction that delighted his women admirers and caused despair among the men. He was quite the best-dressed actor on the stage. Young men-about-town tried their best to copy his style and fashions in tailoring, a fact which was amusingly commented upon by James Douglas in one of his amusing character sketches.

"He alone represents the modern Englishman with unflinching fidelity," he wrote. "He alone paints his cold hard prosaic mind with relentless realism. . . . He is the typical well-groomed Englishman. He carefully eliminates all trace of vulgar humanity from his acting. He behaves on the stage as any perfect gentleman behaves off it. . . . He possesses exuberant physical vitality. He has a powerfully modelled head. His features are trenchantly square. His virile brow and his manly jaw are massively rectangular. His mouth is like a donjon. There is not a single yielding curve in his whole physique. He is a T-square. He is built of grim and rugged harshness. He is indeed almost ungainly in his geometrical vigour.

"But he deliberately tailors away his craggy ferocities. He fashion-plates himself. He tames his natural cliffs and bluffs into flat propriety. He sandpapers his roughness into a sleek and simpering conventionality. He extinguishes himself so thoroughly that his critics mistake the actor for the man. . . . He has created on the stage the average man of the world."

Perhaps it was because of such articles as this that those who never saw Alexander have gained the impression—indeed, I have often heard the view expressed—that he was rather the handsome, well-dressed tailor's model than an actor of great distinction. Let me disabuse them with the words of Gilbert Cannan who, in 1910, wrote in *The Star* :

"Any man who can carve out for himself a position as a servant of the public and, without ever throwing dust in its eyes, maintains that position for twenty years is an admirable creature. That is Mr. Alexander's achievement. He has been an excellent showman but a persuasive rather than a blatant. There have been dull plays

at the St. James's but also there have been plays which have drawn the town and the plays may come and plays may go, there has always been the comfortable feeling that Mr. Alexander, being artiste enough to know his own possibilities and (more important) his own limitations, has taken unto himself a policy and hugged it to himself and adhered to it without swerving right or left. That policy has been to give the public the very best of which he has been capable. He has always shown courage, that quality so rare in theatrical managers in whom it is generally replaced by audacity and recklessness, both of which are the outcome of timidity."

Alexander strove to make his well-conducted theatre the leading comedy house in London, and in that he fully achieved his purpose. There was a distinction about his first-night that few other theatres could boast of. An Alexander *première* was a social event of the first importance. His plays were always perfectly staged and cast, and the elegance of his stage pictures was matched by the framework of the theatre.

It was always one of his principles that a play should preserve a proper balance in its acting and that there should not be a marked predominance in the leading part. He therefore saw to it that his company should consist of the best artists that he could possibly engage. The standard of acting under his banner was always high and at no theatre was the matter of choice in leading ladies considered of more importance. Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Fay Davis, Evelyn Millard, Eva Moore, Mabel Hackney, Julia Neilson and, above all, Irene Vanbrugh, were among them. Their help in giving lustre to Alexander's productions will never be forgotten.

* * *

The doyen of actor-managers when Edward came to the throne was Charles Wyndham who was then in his sixty-fourth year and could look back on a long stage career that began soon after the American Civil War in which he had taken part as an Army surgeon on the Federal side. But, despite his age, he continued to be a distinguished personage in the theatre throughout the Edwardian period.

Even in his sixties he could act with a grace and distinction and with a fine diction that reminded the playgoer that in his time he was incomparable as a light comedian, the agreeable rattle of farces of the Palais Royale type. He retained his good looks and

gallant bearing so well that from time to time he could appear in what was his most successful role, that of the leading part in *David Garrick*, with Mary Moore (Lady Wyndham) who partnered him in so many other of his successes.

Edwardian playgoers knew him mostly, however, as the elderly *raisonneur* in the comedies of Henry Arthur Jones in which he acted with incomparable polish and charm. It was always a delight to see him displaying wisdom and authority, radiating wordly good sense and pointing the moral with such grace of manner.

By the time that Edward came to the throne Wyndham had completed twenty-three years of management at the Criterion Theatre. His financial success there had enabled him to build Wyndham's Theatre and, in 1903, the New Theatre.

It was Wyndham who gave so much encouragement to that promising playwright Hubert Henry Davis. The first of the young writer's light and insubstantial comedies was *Mrs. Gorringer's Necklace*, produced at Wyndham's in 1903. It had a thin plot but Wyndham brought authority to the leading part and played with an ease and distinction that many remember as an example of the perfection which an elderly actor of accomplishment can confer upon a flimsy play. Later, at the New, he presented the same author's *Cousin Kate* and *Captain Drew on Leave*. The latter provided Wyndham and Mary Moore with delightful roles though the play was disappointing. In 1907 came *The Mollusc*, a four-character piece of the most insubstantial kind, though it gave Miss Moore as the selfish, self-indulgent "mollusc" and Wyndham as the elderly courtier delightful parts. Even at seventy he could still play the lover with winning charm and humour. It was one of his last new ventures, for in later years he was mostly occupied with revivals of his old successes.

Wyndham was much more than an accomplished actor. He was an excellent producer and a manager of such ability that he built up a considerable fortune.

Sir John Hare, who was knighted in 1907, was another Victorian veteran who gave distinction to the Edwardian theatre. He was seven years younger than Wyndham, a spare and wiry little man of precise utterance who looked younger than his years and could give the utmost air of naturalness to elderly parts. His methods as a character actor were founded upon sympathetic understanding and observation. There was never any suggestion of exaggeration

in his portraits of age or eccentricity, but by subtle means and by facial expression he gave everything that was required to the part. There was an exquisite finish and polish that reminded one of the delicate art of the miniature painter.

Edwardian playgoers saw him in only a few new roles. Most of his time was spent in playing his old popular parts in *The Gay Lord Quex*, *A Pair of Spectacles* and *A Quiet Rubber*, contrasts in comedy which are delightful to remember.

The only new work of importance in which he appeared was Barrie's *Little Mary*, produced in 1903. The part, as someone remarked, was a kind of moral Lord Quex. Four years later he received his knighthood before appearing at command performances at Sandringham and Windsor in his favourite roles in *A Quiet Rubber* and *A Pair of Spectacles*, plays of which his public in London and the provinces never seemed to tire as long as he adorned them with the polish and exquisite delicacy of his acting.

Another worthy veteran of Victorian days who continued to entertain, though at increasingly rare intervals, was Edward Terry who had built his own bijou theatre in the Strand as far back as 1887.

There has rarely been a more original and amusing type of comedian than this delightful actor who, by the way, was not related to the Terry family. He had established a firm reputation in the old days of Gaiety burlesque when he was one of the famous quartette, the rest of which was composed of Edward Royce, Nelly Farren and Kate Vaughan. But, as he turned later to comedy, Edwardian playgoers knew him mainly as Dick Phenyl, the endearing, gone-to-seed old barrister in Pinero's lushly sentimental play, *Sweet Lavender*. He toured in the play very frequently. It was a part that he made peculiarly his own, a piece of bizarre character comparable in humour but with an added touch of sentiment and pathos, with T. W. Robertson's creation, old Eccles in *Caste*. No other actor could have infused so much dry humour into the part or have given it that effective little touch of wistfulness. He made the shabby, lovable old fellow a noble soul, for all his alcoholic failings. One has a delicious memory of him as he shuffled about the stage crying, "Last time, Clemmy, my boy", in token of his penitence over the breaking of repeated promises of reform. It became a catchword of the times, a tag that will always be associated with the memory of its stage creator.

Terry had a special aptitude for that kind of part. His appearance

was rather odd and so was his voice—a quick, staccato utterance pitched in a querulous high key. He had an air of amiable eccentricity and it required little effort on his part to make an audience laugh.

Apart from his comic powers, Terry was quite an unusual type of actor. In his private life he had many serious interests. He was widely travelled; he was a prominent Freemason, a magistrate, an ardent churchman and was very active in charitable work. These activities occupied much of his time and for that reason his stage appearances were infrequent during Edward's reign. One of the last new plays in which he appeared was the Christmas play, *Pinkie and the Fairies*, in 1908 when the cast also included Ellen Terry.

During his later years he was rarely seen in his own theatre, a quaint little box of a house which, after a dismal spell as a cinema, was swept away in the widening of the Strand not long after the First World War.

In 1906, Terry's was taken over for a season by one of the oddest characters ever associated with theatre management. He was not an actor but this seems the appropriate place in which to bring in W. H. C. Nation. He was more like a creation of Dickens, in his most extravagant mood of invention, than a figure of real life. It is highly probable that Dickens may have met him during his theatrical explorations in London, for this remarkable man first entered into management in 1866 when he was only twenty-three.

Son of a wealthy barrister and educated at Eton and Oxford he took to the theatre as a hobby and not as a living for he had inherited his father's wealth. Fascinated by the theatre, no man ever put more money into unsuccessful stage ventures and there was no one with more pluck—it would be uncharitable to the memory of so kindly an eccentric to call it folly—and perseverance.

After his early ventures at such forlorn houses as Sadler's Wells, Astley's and the old Royalty he retired and occupied his time in writing, composing music and editing a magazine.

He emerged again in 1906 with the avowed object of putting back the hands of the clock in the theatrical world and restoring the kind of entertainment that prevailed in the minor theatres of mid-Victorian times—dull farces and tedious comedies interspersed with old-fashioned songs. At Terry's he began with a double bill consisting of *He's Much to Blame* and *Yellow Fog Island*, ancient relics in which he introduced several songs of his own composition.

There was a lot of banter and amusing comment in the Press but the public was not to be lured inside a theatre by such curious fare. W. H. C. Nation was not much concerned, however, and was not discouraged at all. *A Restless Night* and *The Cricket on the Hearth* followed but with no more success. So apathetic were theatre-goers that there were many evenings when Mr. Nation was almost the only member of the audience. There were times when he would stand outside the theatre distributing free tickets to the reluctant public.

He was bent on his curious hobby and refused to give in. In 1907 he opened at the Scala Theatre with *Stemming the Tide* and *Weighed in the Balance* which again did not attract the public. There was a similar lack of response when he took over the management of the Royalty in 1908-09.

At his productions there never was any of the customary first-night excitement.

Between the acts the atmosphere of the theatre was churchlike in calm and solemnity. Sometimes there were as many as forty in the pit, about the same number in the upper circle and gallery and twenty or so in the stalls. Every person present suspected his neighbour of being a deadhead. And they were probably right.

Nation was the puzzle of the theatrical world, for never by any chance did he produce a play that was remotely successful. Yet the person least concerned about it was Nation himself. He smiled cheerfully all the time though each week he was poorer by hundreds of pounds. With his elaborately bearded face and his old-fashioned garb he was the very picture of imperturbable kindness and benevolence.

Asked how he could explain the lack of drawing power of his odd productions he smiled and said, "I think the taste of playgoers has changed in the last ten years or so. They do not like the simple, homely plays of honest folk; they want grim realism and sex drama."

He confessed that the business of supplying what the public most definitely did not want cost him £2,000 a week but said cheerfully that he liked the sort of play he presented, adding, "I get a lot of pleasure out of it and I am giving employment to a lot of people." That was perfectly true. He was a great benefactor to the profession, a dispenser of salaries to many needy ones.

In spite of this indulgence in an expensive hobby Nation, who was related to the Vanbrugh family, left £311,372 when he died.

IX

MORE POPULAR FAVOURITES

THE EDWARDIAN DECADE WAS EXCEPTIONALLY RICH IN ARTISTES who could claim to have a following among playgoers, those whose very names in the playbills were sufficient at least to make an opening night of any new play a matter of curiosity, expectation and excitement.

In the serious drama there were such Victorian veterans as Wilson Barrett who, a great provincial favourite, had frequent London seasons; Henry Neville and Charles Warner, as well as such younger favourites as Forbes-Robertson, Arthur Bouchier, Norman McKinnel and H. B. Irving (elder son of Sir Henry), and his brother, Laurence. In comedy and farce there were Cyril Maude, Charles Hawtrey, Weedon Grossmith, James Welch, W. S. Penley, George Giddens and Seymour Hicks; in romantic drama, the picturesque cloak-and-sword stuff of gallant deeds and high-toned chivalry, a rich array had as leaders such actors as Fred Terry, Martin Harvey and Lewis Waller.

In their companies, as well as in those of Irving, Tree, Alexander, Wyndham and Hare, were to be seen such seasoned actors as J. H. ("Handsome Jack") Barnes, A. E. George and Lionel Brough (two most versatile character artistes), Henry Kemble, Eric Lewis, Fred Kerr, Leonard Boyne, Herbert Waring, E. Lyall Swete, C. M. Lowne, Holman Clark, Louis Calvert, C. W. Somerset (superb in villainy), H. V. Esmond, Aubrey Smith, C. V. France, Sydney Valentine, C. M. Hallard, Dawson Millward, O. B. Clarence, Lyn Harding, Allan Aynesworth, as well as such younger artistes as Henry Ainley, Oscar Asche, Basil Gill, Gerald du Maurier, A. E. Matthews, Leslie Faber, Matheson Lang, Dennis Eadie, Edmund Gwenn—oh, I could prolong the list indefinitely for I mention only those who subsequently rose to stardom and whose acting in many cases has been admired by even the younger among present-day playgoers.

For those of long experience it is delightful to look over this list which stirs up so many vivid memories. And saddening, too, for how sharp is the regret that so many of these actors, identified with nearly every phase of the art of acting, have never been replaced in style. There are parts inseparable from one's memories of these

artistes ; plays which have no real life or illusion without that which they alone contributed to them. The substance of the play itself may have been forgotten but the part, as one or other of them performed it, is still fondly recalled.

Most of us as young playgoers had our particular idols, but I think there would be general agreement as to the most popular favourites among those I have named. If you favoured picturesque romance and gallantry, Lewis Waller was your man ; if it was farce or light comedy it was Charles Hawtrey.

Two such masters in their own particular line of entertainment have rarely graced the English stage. To be able to recall them as they were in their prime is to console oneself considerably for the passing of time. Not to have seen them is to have missed much of the rich experience that the theatre can afford.

Cloak-and-sword drama, the picturesque dressing-up of improbable but exhilarating adventure in lavish wiggery and toggery, has now passed out of favour but it still found an eager and admiring public at the turn of the century, even when it was expressed in what was once known as "Wardour Street English". Gallant deeds by handsome, fearless heroes ; monstrous trickery by execrable, sinister but just as handsome villains ; lovely heroines, plumes and cloaks, sword-play, caricatures of historical figures, fine silks and satins, love-making on the most ardent but refined plane—the public still loved that sort of thing and the younger folks adored it.

No one figured in it with greater success than Lewis Waller. No actor could represent romantic fiction with such panache. Handsomely endowed, Waller gained early experience with Beer-bohm Tree, and made a reputation in such parts as Laertes, Brutus, and particularly as Hotspur and the King in *Henry V* which were, indeed, among the best achievements of his career. He went into management at the Comedy in 1902, was at the Imperial from 1903-06 and at the Lyric from 1906-10.

He was an actor of ringing voice and striking presence. His appearance was noble. The flash of his glance, the handsome profile, the proud grace of his bearing, the winning or commanding tones of his voice, gave him an irresistible appeal. Men admired him and women simply adored him. During his tenancy of the Lyric, younger playgoers formed themselves into a society, the members of which were proud to wear the "K.O.W." ("Keen on Waller") buttonhole badge. No minor form of Freemasonry ever had a

simpler purpose. It was just to admire the actor, to attend his performances and to collect postcard photographs of him—they sold in quantities that must have made his musical comedy rivals quite envious.

Though artistically Waller's chief successes were as Hotspur and Henry V he was admittedly not an intellectual actor. He did not express the finer shades of emotion or character. His acting appealed less to the mind than to the eye and ear. As J. T. Grein wrote of him on one occasion: "He is one of those who do not only love romance; he lives it. His voice rings so finely and so forcibly that the vocal chords show relaxation. He quivers with passion, with excitement, with righteous ardour that we in our seats begin to feel the effect. And he looks—well, ask the ladies in all parts of the house, ask the girls aloft and below who shout themselves hoarse with admiration how he looks. How can I, mere man, express it? So let me say he looks a picture and as a picture he will anon be handed down to posterity by a famous brush."

That may have been said of him as Hotspur or as Henry V, of his Beaucaire, his Brigadier Gerard, his d'Artagnan or of him in such roles as he played in later productions, among them *Miss Elizabeth's Prisoner* (1904), *Robin Hood* (1906), *The Duke's Motto* (1908), *A White Man* (1908) or *The Fires of Fate* (1909).

Monsieur Beaucaire (1902) was financially one of his most successful productions. He first played it at the Comedy. It ran for 430 performances and was several times revived at the Imperial and the Lyric. I shall never forget the wooing charm, the tenderness, the gallantry of his performance in this play. It lives as much in my memory, as glowingly as the stirring delivery, the rousing, fiery elocution of his Henry V.

In *Brigadier Gerard* (1906) he touched gallantry with excellent comedy as Conan Doyle's brave but *braggadocio* officer—a hero *pour rire*. A less accomplished actor might have made a hash of the part, but even in such a blend of fatuity and gallantry he acted with that perfect sincerity which was one of the secrets of his success. He always appeared to believe in his parts however extravagant they might be.

In *Robin Hood* he was able to temper heroics with broad comedy, though without any loss of dignity. He was a gallant, masterful, smiling robber chief, always dashing and heroic, of course, but lightening the part with gay humour. In *The Duke's Motto* he had a companion part to d'Artagnan, in a gallant cowboy part in *A White*

Man he anticipated the Western film by many years. The public, as I have said, preferred him in a "costume" role, but his range in acting was far wider than many suspected.

The best compliment that I can pay to the memory of that endearing actor Charles Hawtreys is to concur in the statement that he was the most accomplished liar the stage has ever known. To say of a role that it was "a typical Hawtreys part" was to convey exactly the quality and peculiarity of the character that might be expected. You knew that the character would be that of a well-bred, well-groomed, well-fed man of the world of the utmost glib charm who would blandly lie himself in and out of domestic or amatory trouble.

I recall him now, a good-looking, comfortable figure of a man, with his neat dark moustache, his carefully parted hair, his soft, silky-toned voice, the eyes that blinked in well-assumed innocence and child-like wonder, the air of complete assurance and purring self-satisfaction. He reminded one irresistibly of a plump, spoilt, sleek black cat. He could assume an air of utter stupidity. His manner seemed lazy, and when you saw him on the stage he made acting appear to be the easiest of all arts, so effortless the means by which he obtained his effects. Yet behind this air of easy indifference the keenest of wits was at work. He was a fine artiste and the master of a delicate and subtle technique. He knew his limitations and he was artiste enough to keep within them during the whole of his career.

There was nothing grotesque or extravagantly comic in his appearance. On or off the stage Hawtreys always looked much about the same, the good-natured, indolently mannered man-about-town. Yet merely to see him was to laugh.

As *The Times* said, "Hawtreys's strong point on the stage was imperturbability. He would smile and cajole himself into and out of any difficulty; and the worse the trouble the smoother became his brow, the blander his manner. When he puckered his forehead it seemed the heavens would fall. In the earlier farces of his career he was usually the peccant husband; later his scope widened into any sort of selfishness or impudence—always with that well-bred placidity, that hint of being underneath his little weaknesses, a really good fellow."

That described him exactly as he is remembered in such Edwardian comedies as *The Man from Blankley's*, *Lady Huntworth's Experiment* and *Dear Old Charlie*.

Hawtrey, born in 1858, made his first stage appearance in 1881 and had an early success as the adapter of *The Private Secretary* from a German play. That was only the beginning of a career in which he provided the Edwardian playgoer with an almost unbroken succession of delight. Some of his best successes were in the comedies of R. C. Carton and Sutro. He was a superb producer.

However graceless the character he might assume, you could never be angry with Hawtrey. He might lie and deceive with deplorable effrontery, he might be hopelessly intoxicated as he was in *Lord and Lady Algy*, but never for a moment did his charm desert him.

His behaviour in *Dear Old Charlie* was most reprehensible but though this play, when it was produced at the Vaudeville in 1908, caused a storm of controversy and became a synonym for the extremest stage naughtiness, no one ever thought of blaming Hawtrey for appearing in it.

The farce was attacked right and left. It was denounced as shameless and immoral, the offence being aggravated by the fact that its author, Charles Brookfield (who had adapted it from an old comedy by Labiche), became the official Reader of Plays in the Lord Chamberlain's department. It certainly was a cynical appointment and great play was made with the fact at the subsequent Royal Commission of inquiry into the workings of the Stage Censorship, a matter to which I shall refer later.

Dear Old Charlie, frivolous and amusing, was naughty enough, no doubt, but its naughtiness would be considered mild enough in these days. It was all about a gay Lothario who had committed himself deeply with two married women but had so hoodwinked the husbands that they believed it was their society he sought and not that of their wives. The whole fun of the piece turned upon Charlie's ingenious explanations when his past was revealed.

"It is possible to be indignant over a piece that contains so little probability and so much extravagance," said one critic. "One may, on the other hand, regard the story as fantastic and enjoy the wit and ludicrous situations and the brilliant acting of Mr. Hawtrey in a typical Hawtrey part. No actor on the stage can lie with quite such bland plausibility as he, no one can be more gracefully imperturbable."

The rigid moralist might have condemned the play but it is hardly likely that he could have failed to be diverted by Hawtrey's acting.

Charm of quite a different kind was exercised by Cyril Maude, than whom few actor-managers played more varied leading comedy parts during the Edwardian period.

He radiated good humour and beamed good nature. The public loved the mannerisms of the dapper little actor, particularly that curious little chuckle and the bubbling fun that seemed to arise from his own enjoyment of his part. He could be comic and he could be intensely sympathetic. And, if he chose he could be testy, too, for had not some of his earliest successes been those in which he had impersonated crabbed old age in old English comedy? "The older I become, the younger the parts I played," he once said. But then he always seemed to have the secret of youth. His real nature was buoyant and sunny. It required all his powers of acting to represent the reverse.

In 1901 he was in management with Frederick Harrison at the Haymarket with such successes as *The Little Minister*, *The Manœuvres of Jane* and *The Second in Command* behind him and such others as *Cousin Kate* and *Joseph Entangled* to come. In most of these he was partnered by his beautiful wife Winifred Emery.

The Maude-Harrison management was well in keeping with the highest traditions of the historic theatre. You would never see anything of a questionable kind there. The best of classical English comedy, plays of healthy excitement and of robust sentiment by leading playwrights, the cream of modern comedy. The plays were always carefully chosen, mounted with taste and cast to perfection. It was a house of the utmost refinement; the atmosphere was always dignified. It was a theatre, as someone said, to which you could take your maiden aunt without a fear.

When, in 1905, Cyril Maude parted company with Harrison he acquired the Avenue in Northumberland Avenue and spent a small fortune on having the theatre rebuilt. But disaster came. The roof of Charing Cross station collapsed and wrecked the building completely. After a long dispute he was awarded £20,000 damages. Rebuilding cost him a great deal more than that but, in the interim, he had found one of his biggest successes in *Toddles* which he produced at the Duke of York's in 1906.

This was just a frivolous farce, adapted anonymously from *Triplepatte* by Tristan Bernard and Godfereaux and its start did not seem very promising. For once he was a young man, a hard-up

and valetudinarian peer, a good-natured but irresolute little fellow whom everybody, for uncertain reasons, was trying to force into marriage with an heiress.

But for all the flimsiness of the play, Maude, with his natural charm, adorned the part with delicate and restrained comedy and relieved it from triviality. It was transferred to Wyndham's Theatre and then again to his new theatre which had been christened the Playhouse.

The opening night was a notable occasion. Bernard Shaw wrote a not too happily inspired prologue, Beerbohm Tree made a fraternal speech of good wishes, Arthur Bouchier and Violet Vanbrugh appeared in a one-act play and Clara Butt sung the National Anthem.

The financial success of *Toddles* was a handsome compensation for the loss he had suffered in the Playhouse disaster. After that came many more comedies including *The Flag Lieutenant* which provided him with a very congenial part as Richard Lascelles, and *Tantalising Tommy*.

Artistically his best work was accomplished in old English comedy. His Sir Peter Teazle, in the Haymarket revival of *The School for Scandal*, was exquisitely done. I doubt if any actor since that time has given us a picture of that character so fine in texture and finish. Would a comedy like George Colman's now almost forgotten *The Heir-at-Law* bear revival? If we had a comedian like Cyril Maude it might—but not unless. He was the last to revive the play in London. That was at the Waldorf (now the Strand), in 1906, when he played the part of Dr. Pangloss, the grotesque little pedant whose absurdities provide the richest humour of the piece. In his solemn black habit and with his bushy white wig and monstrous three-cornered hat he cut a quaint figure, particularly when he danced a jig in the open street with a crowd of urchins applauding him.

"There is no caricature, no farcical exaggeration easily raising laughter but spoiling what is the natural drawing of the part," wrote *The Stage*. "At the same time Mr. Maude does raise laughter and raises it in the most artistic way. He is especially successful in the manner in which the innumerable tags are given. With little 'hems' and 'hums' they fall naturally into the Doctor's copious speech. Mr. Maude imparts them with just the proper relish. His needy philosopher is glib, genial, adaptive, letting learning wait on a lively appreciation of three hundred pounds a year with favours

to come from Dick and Dick's mother. It is a quaint Pangloss and a likeable . . ."

And William Archer commended this piece of acting in such words as these : " The lightness, airiness and twinkling whimsicality of his impersonation is beyond praise. It is odd—it is perhaps indefensible—that a figure so remote from nature, a caricature of nothing at all, should yet cause us keen pleasure. But defensible or not, our enjoyment is not to be gainsaid. The way in which Mr. Maude brings out the Doctor's running fire of tags from the classics is inimitable and irresistible. As a purely comic creation the performance must be classed as a little masterpiece. It is as exquisitely finished as a bit of Dresden china."

Like many actors of definite personality and well-marked mannerisms Maude gradually made capital out of them and he tended to emphasise them by exaggeration. That had been noticed when, in 1904, he appeared as Captain Barley, the bargemaster in *Beauty and the Barge*, the adaptation of W. W. Jacobs's story. But that was what his admirers had grown to expect of him. Cyril Maude as a dear, white-haired old man was a joy in any such part. So, in various forms, he had to repeat very much the same kind of role. The fact remains, however, that he really was a character actor of uncommon ability.

Just as Cyril Maude radiated genial humour and effervescent good nature off the stage as well as on it, so did Arthur Bourchier radiate strength, determination, stubbornness, doggedness and such rugged qualities.

They were typical of the man himself. The heavy, square build, the pugnacious set of the jaw, the strong voice, the firm cast of his features, his determined, masterful bearing, made him one of the most striking personalities among actor-managers.

It was characteristic of his vigour and enterprise that while at Oxford—where incidentally he took his M.A.—he was the chief founder of the O.U.D.S. and that same vigour soon brought him to the front when he took to the stage professionally in 1890.

There was nothing subtle or delicate about his art. Whether in Shakespeare, in classical plays, in modern comedy or in drama, he always aimed for broad effects. Sometimes it tended to roughness and, in his later years, it developed into something that verged upon boisterousness and caricature. But during his Edwardian period he showed more restraint. His humorous acting was always invigorating in its rough breeziness.

In his productions he showed great catholicity of taste, putting all his characteristic energy and enthusiasm into every production whether light or heavy in mood. He may not have been a great Shakesporean actor but his Macbeth, Shylock, Henry VIII and Iago were performances of high merit. Whatever his part he always dominated the stage and, though one might quarrel with some of his impersonations, it cannot be said that he ever gave a dull or listless performance, for he was tenaciously devoted to the art of acting.

I always thought—and most old playgoers will agree with me, I think—that his most successful part was in Sutro's *The Walls of Jericho* (1904). The part of the bluff and rugged, outspoken man from Australia who scorned the effeteness of English society and indulged in the rousing tirade that provided a finely effective scene, was perfectly suited to his vigorous personality. He always played the part with unusual zest and enjoyment. Few of his parts were more highly praised. "In its simple and direct expression of manly and wholesome thought it comes to us like a breath of good air," said one critic. "Mr. Arthur Bouchier really gives us the thing that we need, a stimulus and a tonic and in this freedom from bondage of a strong man we have something more than a theatrical success—something indeed approaching a *raison d'être* for the dominance of our race." The play could not have evoked such eulogy without the rousing vigour of Bouchier's acting.

Another play which provided him with a similarly strong part was *Samson* (1909), an adaptation of Bernstein's work. He was the man who had made a god of money and brought his wife's lover to beggary though it involved his own ruin. The man's lack of scruple, his savage energy and his hungry, passionate love for his wife, were depicted with all the force that Bouchier, better than most actors, could so well command.

He brought originality to his readings of such Shakesporean parts as Macbeth and Shylock. To his performance in *The Merchant of Venice* "Mordred", in *The Referee*, paid this high tribute: "Mr. Arthur Bouchier's Shylock marks a stage in the development of this actor and his performance of the Jew leaves an ineffaceable impression. His Shylock is not going to make tradition, as only great actors do, but it is a piece of acting of sustained force, destitute of subtlety as it may be. Mr. Bouchier makes an out-and-out brute of the Jew, although, to speak by the book, his speeches suggest something more intellectual in the character than the spite and cunning which Mr. Bouchier so plainly indicates. Even in

Shylock's appearance the actor will allow no good in the Jew. Shylock is, as it were, own brother to Mr. Tree's Fagin and not only is this grimy customer an unlikely person to be invited to sit at the table with a Christian gentleman but Mr. Bouchier sometimes neglects to moderate his voice to the physical condition of the miserable old man.

"In the first act the actor establishes himself at once as the chief interest of the play, and I have never seen him act with more authority, more feeling, and more variety than he displays in the Trial scene. In his eagerness, his hatred of Antonio, and his abject humiliation his acting is telling and a good performance is crowned by his expression at the end, of a broken spirit. His Shylock may not be Shakespeare's conception of the character; I will not even allow that this is a question which is open to argument, but whether it is or is not the Jew that Shakespeare drew, of one thing I am quite sure—it is the Jew who is going to draw the town."

The combative, masterful spirit was innate in Bouchier and he exhibited it in all his actions. He was something of a theatrical dictator. He held firm opinions. He was quick-tempered, stubborn, tenacious and inclined to be overbearing in his manner. He was intolerant of criticism. In fact he frequently showed his dislike of the professional critic, or "reporters", as he sometimes contemptuously referred to them. Once, resenting a previous notice, he caused something of a minor sensation by excluding A. B. Walkley from his theatre. After that *The Times* paid for its distinguished critic's seats.

Later on the same kind of dispute flared up again. This time E. A. Baughan of *The Daily News* was not invited to the first night of *The Morals of Marcus* at the Garrick Theatre. It was suggested that he should attend a performance during the second week. Bouchier's excuse was that first-night criticism was as unfair to the critic, who had to write his notice in a great hurry, as it was to the management and the actors concerned in the production.

William Archer gallantly rushed into the dispute on Baughan's behalf in an article of imposing length in *The Tribune*, and in the course of some three thousand words or so described Bouchier's action as "a systematic determination to exercise a censorship of the Press". Pretending to be much affected by the thought of witnessing "the spectacle of some rejected critic, pale and dishevelled, turning his back upon the artistic delights of which

he was judged unworthy and as he pursues his eastern path, blistering his shirt front with briny tears", Archer said he proposed to pay for his own first-night seats in future.

After that the dispute grew really acrimonious, and the ample newspapers of the day gladly permitted their columns to be filled with angry correspondence on the subject. Bouchier who, with the Press against him, suggested that he merely wished critics to postpone their notices and to write them at their leisure, had some blistering things to say of Archer in particular and of dramatic critics in general. He declared that critics devoted columns to the play but rarely took any notice of the actors or the acting and that English plays were belittled in favour of those of any foreign dramatist. Because of that he described Walkley as "a little Englander" and he added that Hamilton Fyfe and Max Beerbohm were tarred with the same brush.

The correspondence made good reading to those who had the leisure to wade through many columns of closely printed type. It was not a very happy episode but it gave Bouchier a certain amount of publicity; it provided the critics with some, too, as well as giving them material for their articles, and no doubt it entertained a number of playgoers. All ended happily, however, for in the end Bouchier, conscious perhaps that he had rather overstated his case and that what he had done was not likely to improve his relations with the Press, climbed down with more or less grace and critics were once more invited to his *premières*.

This episode was typical of Bouchier's masterful manner and his strongly aggressive spirit, but happily one is inclined to remember him more as an ornament of the Edwardian stage and one of its most enterprising actor-managers.

X

TOURING IDOLS

THERE WERE SEVERAL ACTOR-MANAGERS WHO, IF POPULAR IN London, found their greatest support in the provinces. No one among them devoted such popularity to higher purpose than F. R. Benson in whom Shakespeare was the master-passion of a lifetime.

It was not so much his achievements as an actor that brought him deserved fame and honour as that his company was the recognised nursery of the English stage, the training ground of innumerable actors and actresses who were destined to make their mark in the theatre as individual artists much more emphatically than he had done.

The value of Benson's services to the theatre can never be fully estimated. His passionate enthusiasm kept Shakespeare alive in the provinces. He took the drama to the remotest parts of the kingdom and no man ever did more to conquer the last lingering prejudices against the stage.

What helped him particularly in his earlier days was that he was a well-educated, handsome young man of good family and good fortune who, on coming down from Oxford, recruited a company of much superior quality to that of the touring mummer of those times. It consisted largely of young men of similar mind and social status, imbued with the same artistic sense and—what was then considered remarkable—of athletic prowess. No one could hope to join his company who did not share his passion for strenuous activities outside the theatre.

At Stratford on Avon he was responsible for the annual Shakespearean festival for thirty years, and when the Memorial Theatre season was going through a thin time he was ungrudging in lavishing his private means towards its support.

He was an excellent actor in many roles but not a great one. He was too much occupied with the cares and anxieties of the actor-manager to do himself full justice in some of the parts he undertook. It was not well that he was always his own leading man. He had the lean face of the scholar, features that gave a classical dignity to many of his parts, though he lacked repose.

Some playgoers found fault with certain mannerisms and with his diction which was somewhat over-accentuated. Many thought his voice lacked music and variety of tone. But there was never any lack of enthusiasm and earnestness in whatever he did.

His best part was as Richard II, a piece of acting of which C. E. Montague once wrote: "to whose chief interest we do not think that critical justice has ever been done. An actor faulty in some other ways but always picturesque, romantic and inventive, with a fine sensibility to beauty in words and situations, and a voice that gives this sensibility its due, Mr. Benson brings out admirably that half of the character which criticism seems almost to have taken pains to obscure—the capable and faithful artiste in the same skin as the implacable and unfaithful King."

His seasons in London were frequent and in them the West End often saw the début of many promising young actors and actresses who, thanks to his excellent training, rapidly achieved success and fame.

Johnston Forbes-Robertson was a much finer artiste than his admirers permitted him to be. This accomplished actor, of great physical beauty and gifted with a voice of gold and silver tones, acknowledged Phelps as his master, and before the dawn of the new century had acted with Irving and Ellen Terry, with Hare, with Genevieve Ward, Mme. Modjeska and Mary Anderson.

He had been brought up in an artistic circle, and his whole life was dedicated to beauty. You could read that in the sensitive outlines of his thin ascetic features. They were essentially noble in expression. His natural bent was towards art. He was, in fact, a gifted painter.

He was the curious case of a man who, though admirably endowed and intellectually and physically fitted for the profession, never really cared for acting. Yet he won an enormous public. Early in his career he dedicated himself to Shakespeare, and there are many who will tell you that his Hamlet has rarely since been bettered. Bernard Shaw wrote of it: "Mr. Forbes-Robertson's own performance has a continuous charm, interest and variety which are the result not only of his well-known grace and accomplishment as an actor, but a genuine delight—the rarest thing on our stage—in Shakespeare's art and a natural familiarity with the plane of his imagination. . . . He plays as Shakespeare should be played, on the line and to the line, with the utterance and acting simultaneous, inseparable and in fact identical."

To have some idea of the gentle beauty and winning sweetness of his Hamlet one must go to James Agate who said of a performance of exquisite beauty and physical grace: "He goes down to history as the most popular Hamlet since Henry Irving—popular in the non-detrimental sense of appealing most nearly to general sympathy. . . . Of Forbes-Robertson we may say that he played Hamlet with careful and patient art, the temperament of an English gentleman—Meredith's Sir Willoughby would have played him so—and the lustre and distinction of what had once been great physical beauty. . . . It was unmatched, we must think, in our time for serenity and steadfastness and high aloofness from the encroaching spirit of compromise. It was the Hamlet on which the mind dwells most lovingly. To many of us perhaps he was the 'sweet prince' *tout court* without need of preamble or elaboration."

Yet it was not in this kind of acting that Forbes-Robertson was most familiar to Edwardian audiences. They saw him mostly in plays of extreme mediocrity, in such pieces of super-sentiment as *Mice and Men*, an adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's *The Light That Failed* and in Jerome K. Jerome's *The Passing of the Third Floor Back*, a play of pseudo-religiosity which attained a popularity equal to that of Wilson Barrett's *The Sign of the Cross* and equal to it in banality. So the actor sacrificed his art to satisfy popular taste. Such plays one supposes, gave a comforting impression of serving an uplifting purpose to the unsophisticated provincial public that still regarded theatre-going as a somewhat reprehensible way of passing the time.

Yet it must be said that Forbes-Robertson's acting in this play had undeniable dignity, grace and charm. As the mysterious Stranger—an austere lay-preacher in a frock-coat that hid all the actor's physical grace—he was yet a striking figure as he accomplished miraculous changes of nature among the heterogeneous collection of unpleasant people in a cheap Bloomsbury boarding-house. The mellow, cello-like quality of his voice, the chiselled beauty of his features, his serenity—all this with the additional aid of limelight, suggested the spiritual presence of a character that was obviously intended to be the personification of the Saviour. One could not help but admire the actor, for beauty there always was in every application of his art, though admiration might be tempered with regret at the thought that such gifts as his should be bestowed on plays of such little worth.

John Martin Harvey was also an idol of the provincial public,

his name inseparable from the part of Sydney Carton in *The Only Way*. Year in, year out, whether he was on tour or whether he was appearing in his regular London season, this play had to be included in his repertory. The public almost swooned with ecstasy when they heard the dissipated, self-sacrificing Sydney declare, "It is a far, far better thing I do, etc."

How one recalls the presence of that romantically dishevelled little figure with the pale countenance and picturesque sweep of well-disordered hair as he paused before the guillotine and uttered these words in that rich, somewhat husky, fluty voice.

Martin Harvey was bred in the romantic tradition for he played in Irving's company for fourteen years. He was never given very considerable parts but the training was of immense value to him and he was a devoted admirer of his chief. His opportunity came when, during an interim season at the Lyceum in 1899, he produced *The Only Way* and that established him firmly as an actor-manager.

All his plays were stuff and fustian of the romantic kind. One remembers him as the melancholy Count Skariatine in *A Cigarette Maker's Romance*, as the devil-may-care Lieut. Reresby in *The Breed of the Treshams*, as well as in such revivals of Irving's old successes as *The Bells*, *The Lyons Mail* and *The Corsican Brothers*, and particularly—during a more ambitious venture—as Pelleas to the Melisande of Mrs. Patrick Campbell. His style was always picturesque, and romantically attractive. His figure was slight and almost fragile. He was never a robust actor for tearing parts. Instead he gave us pictures quite often of haunting delicacy.

Fred Terry was another who, with his lovely wife, Julia Neilson, gave great joy to the multitude with rousing romantic comedy and drama which, though most entertaining, never gave full opportunity to his qualities as a character actor of great skill and address. He had his full share of the Terry good looks—he was the younger brother of Ellen—he was tall and well built, his voice was musical and there was an invigorating air of buoyancy about him that made him almost as agreeable a villain as he was an ideal hero. He mixed heroics and comedy with wonderful skill and judgment.

He had acted under Irving, Hare and George Alexander before going into management with the production of *Sweet Nell of Old Drury* at the Haymarket in 1900. In this he was King Charles to the Nell Gwyn of Miss Neilson. That play proved a gold mine for many years and so did *Henry of Navarre*. Then came *The Scarlet Pimpernel* in which he played the elusive and nonchalant Sir Percy

Blakeney. After that there was little need for any addition to the Terry-Neilson repertory. The public never tired of them in their familiar roles.

Big and burly Oscar Asche, Australian-born and well schooled in Benson's company, was an actor whose services to the Shakespearean and poetic drama were, in my opinion, never fully recognised—because all his earlier achievements were to be swamped by the later fame of his production of that pantomimic piece of superbanality *Chu Chin Chow* during the First World War.

I have rarely heard his Othello recalled, yet it was as near to greatness as any interpretation this century has provided. He had nearly every qualification for the part—the physique, the resonant voice, the authority, the repose, the breadth of style and the freedom of passionate utterance. He was most amusing as Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. His Angelo in *Measure for Measure* at the Adelphi had a splendid bluff vigour and a specious plausibility. The change from calm indifference to dawning lust, the animal passion shown in the second scene with Isabella, and the submissive recognition when his double villainy was exposed, were the leading notes of a really magnificent piece of acting.

Moreover, he was a fine producer. With Otho Stuart, at the Adelphi, he made an excellent thing of *Measure for Measure*, clearing the play of its beastliness without harm to its coherence, and he endeavoured to combine the necessities of the more modern style of representation with respect and reverence for Shakespeare. The result was entirely successful, for the essentials were preserved while ridding the play of those grosser embellishments more suited to the stronger stomachs of Elizabethan times.

Asche's rugged power found a fine outlet when he appeared as Hephæstion in *The Virgin Goddess*. Passion seemed to thrill in every nerve of the warrior when he was overcome with a gust of rage.

What Matheson Lang gave to the stage in later years in the way of picturesque adventure and romanticism is still well remembered. He was an up-and-coming young actor of great promise at the beginning of the century—handsome, well built, well trained in the speaking of blank verse. He was Mrs. Langtry's leading man, and he played for several seasons in Ellen Terry's company. His brave and honest young Cornish knight in *Tristram and Iseult* was a prelude to the more commonplace heroics of Hall Caine melodrama but in whatever he did it was always with a rousing, manly vigour and a persuasive force.

Afghanistan

time explaining to voters what kind of people they ought to vote for, that is to say, they were soliciting support for candidates sympathetic to the administration. Yet there is no evidence of other direct pressures being brought to bear on the electorate to influence their voting. Clearly, a man had to be able to dip substantially into his own purse to finance a campaign, and this naturally tended to limit candidature to the wealthier sections of the community; but, apart from this practical consideration, the field was open to all comers who could satisfy the qualificatory provisions laid down in the constitution (Art. 46). Considerable pains were taken also with the conduct of the ballot itself, both to ensure its secrecy and its accuracy. Each candidate had a separate ballot box with his name, photograph and electoral symbol on it and into one of these, in the privacy of a screened booth, the voter dropped his ballot paper to indicate his choice.

Despite these efforts, however, the election remained largely confined to intellectuals and city dwellers, as one might expect for the first election among a generally illiterate population. Even in the cities the poll was not high—from 5 to 10 per cent of those eligible to vote—and in the rural areas it was often as little as 2 per cent. Thus we cannot reasonably call the present deputies in the Shura representative of the people as a whole, though they certainly are representative of the politically aware and interested (or organisable), with the towns naturally returning the more radical and unusual members. Moreover, in assessing the poll in rural areas with a very low turn-out of voters, one has to appraise with caution the merits of the multi-ballot-box mode of voting.

Yet the election can be seen as a clear, if limited, success for the democratisers. There was virtually no indication of corruption or coercion; there was a competitive campaign and a fair ballot. The next step must be to extend the interest in elections to as large a part of the adult population as possible. The municipal elections of autumn 1966 have probably gone some way towards doing this, being as they are of more immediate concern to a greater number of people. For the

I recall him as an actor of particularly magnetic quality, of a kind that I find it hard to define. It was not only that his appearance was intellectual and handsome in a sombre way; it was some kind of magnetic power not only of voice and looks but of an indefinable personal force that made you aware of his presence before you had sighted him on the stage.

There was hardly an actor more busily occupied throughout the Edwardian years than Norman McKinnel, nor one whose acting gave such force, strength and integrity to a play. He was decidedly unactorish in appearance, this tall, strongly built, heavy-featured man. His movements were slow and rather ponderous. His attitudes at time were almost awkward. He rarely appeared to smile. He stood four-square upon the stage. He gave the impression of rock-like strength and reliability. He had none of the ordinary actor's mobility of expression. But what power was concealed within that big frame! Few actors could produce so fully the effect of force and vigour with such little apparent effort. He could be absolutely immobile, statuesque and silent, while suggesting a volcano of expression and feeling.

He was a magnificent Lear at the Haymarket. His performances during the Vedrenne-Barker season at the Court, during which he played the Devil in the Don Juan in Hell scene of Shaw's *Man and Superman*, and the clergyman in *Candida*, were notable. He was of great service to Lena Ashwell during her season at the Kingsway. But his most notable part of the period was as John Anthony, the aged employer in Galsworthy's *Strife*. It was a masterly performance of the master-man—a revelation of genuine character, simple, forceful and of absolute integrity.

Of the younger actors who made their reputations during the Edwardian reign I select the two who, it would be generally acknowledged made the most rapid advance in popular favour in widely different fields.

One was Henry Ainley who was only twenty-three when he appeared with George Alexander as Paolo in *Paolo and Francesca* in 1902. He was then immature but he made an instant appeal because of his romantic good looks and physical grace and a voice which was rich and extremely musical from fluty sweetness to deep organ tone. If ever a young actor was cut out to register poetic rapture and romantic fervour and the glory of beautiful youth it was he. From 1902 he played such parts as the Rev. Gavin Dishart in *The Little Minister*, Bassanio, Romeo, Orlando, Orestes in *Electra*, Cassio,

Valentine in *You Never Can Tell*, Joseph Surface, Faust and an almost incredible number of other Shakesperean roles as well as those in plays of the sort that James Agate has described as "dignified tushery".

The second was Gerald du Maurier who was six years older than Ainley. He had taken to the stage light-heartedly because it amused him to do so and it was fortunate that an excellent early experience under such managements as those of Hare, Tree and Hawtrey compelled him to take his profession seriously. But it was with Mrs. Patrick Campbell, who was an exacting taskmistress and had a dominating personality, that he gained most that was useful in perfecting his art. "Under her tuition", writes his daughter, Daphne du Maurier, in *Gerald: a Portrait*, "he became a man of certain depth of understanding and subtlety; instead of a spoilt, irresponsible boy. He learnt how to talk, how to be silent and how not to be consistently selfish. Much of his charm, his delicacy, his ease of manner and his assurance he owed to her."

Between 1900-01 he appeared with her in *Mr. and Mrs. Daventry*, *The Fantastics* and *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, and he began to be noticed by the critics. "This young actor", wrote Clement Scott, "promises to take a high place on the stage, for he improves with every new part he undertakes."

A steady advance began in 1902 when he played the Hon. Ernest Woolley in Barrie's *The Admirable Crichton*, during the run of which, incidentally, he married Muriel Beaumont who was his stage sweetheart, the Lady Agatha. In 1904 he created the double role of Captain Hook and Mr. Darling in *Peter Pan*. His first great success came in 1906 when he played the cricketer-cracksman in *Raffles*, first of the crook plays that subsequently flooded the stage.

As *Raffles*, du Maurier was an immense success. The play was a crude example of a form that was later to attain real skill and adroitness but, as his daughter records, "he brought something to it that was personal and unique—a suggestion of extreme tension masked by a casual gaiety—making of *Raffles* someone highly strung, nervous and finely drawn, yet fearless and full of a reckless and rather desperate indifference, someone who by the force of his high spirits had developed a kink in his nature."

Later on he created the part of the gauche and earnest John Shand in Barrie's *What Every Woman Knows*, but the public could not forget *Raffles*, the crook-hero and so came Arsène Lupin and Jimmy Valentine in the same vein and again they were immensely

popular with the public. He had certainly found his *métier* in this cool, easy, casual and naturalistic style. Again, to quote Miss du Maurier, "Why should he bother about real plays when these trifles filled the theatre and he was well paid and he had only to look over his left shoulder at a dark corner and light a cigarette to ensure a breathless hush among the audience? Why make an effort to learn long and exquisite speeches by good authors when 'I love you, damn you' and 'What about a drink?' succeeded even better amongst the public and took less time to say? It was pleasant, this business of being charming and rather amusing and making love light-heartedly."

All that du Maurier did so charmingly on the stage, no doubt, looked casual and effortless, but there was much more in it than that. This easy indifference, this acting without passion and emotion, this air of strolling through a play, was the outcome of an artistic sense, immense concentration and hard work. It suited his lean, attractive personality. It did not look like acting but that was because it was done with such exquisite polish. Behind the lighting of a cigarette, the saunter across the stage and every tone and inflection of his voice, there was considered art and a superb technique.

The proof that it was acting of the utmost finish is that no other actor has ever been able to succeed in du Maurier roles with such perfection.

The low comedy actors of the time were mostly to be found in musical comedy and that is a subject which I will deal with later. But there were two actors who displayed sheer artistry in comedy and farce.

They were Weedon Grossmith and James Welch. The first was an admirable comedian, but for subtlety as well as for comic effect I think Grossmith was outshone by Welch. Small, spare and alert he was a kind of blend of W. S. Penley and Edmund Payne. From a part which might be anything or nothing, a skeleton part for which the actor must provide life and individuality, he could clothe the bare bones with flesh and blood. With a score of adroit touches he showed that the lightest form of the drama could be provided with the subtlest shades of observation and imagination. He was an actor who caused laughter as easily as he commanded one's sympathy for, like a true comedian—notably like Dan Leno—there was always a suggestion of pathos and wistfulness beneath the comic surface. He had feeling as well as humour.

Remembering his Mr. Stubbs, the heroic bootmaker who

worshipped beauty in Henry Arthur Jones's *The Heroic Stubbs*, and his Sir Guy de Vere in that long-running absurdity *When Knights Were Bold*, one cannot but be impressed by the versatility in the art of amusing that was his.

There remains one actor whom it is difficult to fit into a category. I mean the ebullient, the mercurial, the abounding and volatile Seymour Hicks who was here, there and everywhere, all over the shop, it seemed, at once; breathless and restless, acting at top speed, pouring out diverting nonsense in farces and musical comedies, overwhelming you with his whirlwind attack and his irresistibly breezy charm, managing, writing musical pieces, and altogether behaving like an impudent and good-looking typhoon.

During most of the first decade of the century he devoted his gay talent to musical pieces, always in company with his enchanting wife Ellaline Terriss. In between such engaging appearances he found time to open the Aldwych Theatre in 1905 and the Hicks (now the Globe) in 1906.

By such activities he rightly belongs to the realm of musical comedy, but he is entitled to be included among the "legitimate" actors if only because it was he who, in 1902, created the part of the dashing Valentine Brown in Barrie's *Quality Street*—and how very dashing he was as that sentimentally romantic hero—and because in 1901 he gave a quite notable performance as Scrooge.

XI

AN ALBUM OF FAIR WOMEN

ONE OF MY MOST TREASURED POSSESSIONS IS A MASSIVE BOOK weighing four pounds or so and entitled *The Stage in the Year 1900*. It is handsomely bound in tooled leather, a *de luxe* edition printed on hand-made paper, subscribed for by royalty, the nobility and the gentry and containing the biographies and plates in photogravure of some ninety-five leading players of the period. A costly production it must have been, evidence in itself of the interest taken in the stage at the beginning of the century.

Nearly every one of the players named in this fascinating record, though referred to as Victorian stage favourites, continued to adorn the Edwardian stage. A few of them, though highly praised at the time, are now completely forgotten and there are others whose names have in them the romantic ring of some far-off legend. Their fame is remembered but it is for their classical beauty—typical of the period when cold, stately and statuesque charm was so much admired on the stage as in Society—rather than for their particular brilliance in acting.

I mean such lovely ladies as Mary Anderson, Lily Langtry, Mrs. Brown Potter and Julie Opp. Mary Anderson had long retired from the stage but the others were engaged during the Edwardian period. Striking beauty was then an often sufficient passport to the stage. I remember seeing Mrs. Brown Potter in some costume drama at the time when her name was considered a sufficient draw in itself and, though no doubt my youthful judgment was very immature, I thought her singularly wooden and amateurish. But there was no doubt about the striking attraction of her beauty. It was of that kind that was likely to distract the attention of anyone susceptible to sheer loveliness from any defects in the acting.

Edwardian playgoers saw but little of that splendid old actress Genevieve Ward who was a survivor of the great days of tragic acting. Her very appearance was grand and impressive. She was noble of brow, dark-eyed, deep-voiced and majestic and one can never forget those full organ tones and her measured fineness of

diction. In 1906 she emerged to appear as Cleito, the aged, blind old mother in Rudolf Besier's *The Virgin Goddess*, at the Adelphi. And then, sublime in her tenderness and maternal grief, she rose to heights of great passion and made hers the outstanding performance of the production.

Who now recalls such names as Miss Fortescue, Lettice Fairfax, Sybil Carlisle, Maud Jeffries, Florence Perry, Mabel Hackney (Mrs. Laurence Irving), Mrs. Cecil Raleigh, Janette Steer, Olga Nethersole, Ethel Irving, Annie Hughes and Jessie Batemen? Gracious women all, they were among the popular leading ladies of the period but their fame has hardly survived. One recalls the name of Dorothea Baird (Mrs. H. B. Irving) because not only will her name always be associated with the part of Trilby (and a lovelier evocation of du Maurier's barefooted heroine can never be imagined) but because in her early retirement she devoted herself for many years to praiseworthy works of charity. And, of course, there is the adorable Ellaline Terriss who gave such an enchanting performance as Phoebe "of the ringlets" in Barrie's *Quality Street*.

One personality looms formidably from out of the early Edwardian theatrical scene—that of Madge Kendal. "Madge Kendal"? No, that seems too light, too familiar, for that awesome figure. "Mrs. Kendal" rather let us say, for that was how she was generally styled until, long after her retirement from the stage, she was created Dame Madge. There was certainly a Mr. Kendal always associated with her in acting and in management. In fact only on one occasion during their long married life were they parted and that was when Mrs. Kendal temporarily joined Tree's company to engage with Ellen Terry in the glorious frolic of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. This was a surprising departure and no wonder the public was captivated when the friendly stage rivals (to quote S. R. Littlewood in the *Morning Leader*) "came hand in hand upon the stage, ambling, pacing, smiling, swaying—prancing almost with high spirits, two equal queens without the shadow of a thought of rivalry, both looking so radiant and so pretty and so roguish—and so young!—that if the play had finished even there the Coronation¹ would hardly have been cheated of its hopes."

On that singular occasion Mrs. Kendal unbent to a degree that may have given her a lessened dignity but it heightened her charm—if charm is the right word in which to describe her great command of the stage.

¹ That of King Edward.

At that time Mrs. Kendal, like Ellen Terry, was still a beautiful woman and such a rollicking comedy gave her a holiday from the sedateness of the customary type of play in which she was latterly known, strongly sentimental pieces in which she could evoke pathos or sympathy for wronged elderly women. At that period she had already been known as "the Matron of the British Drama", a title in which she took immense pride. It was, in fact, an admirable description of her. She was tall, stately, commanding, awe-inspiring, a figure of distinction calculated, one thinks, more to inspire fear and respect than affection. She, like her husband—a handsome, military-looking man but a rather stodgy and pompous actor who was immensely overshadowed by his much more talented wife—made a great parade of extreme respectability and domestic felicity which developed to an extravagant degree as the years went on.

They retired from the stage in 1908 and after that time it was only Mrs. Kendal who was seen at occasional charity matinees. After her retirement she took it upon herself to be the outspoken critic of everything modern. She dressed in the bonneted, sedate and voluminous Victorian fashion and she never lost occasion to denounce those things of which she strongly disapproved. And that included practically everything—current fashions and current morals, the modern girl and her make-up, divorce, family life, the decay of religion, the decay of acting and of playwriting, the ways of dramatic critics—everything in the eyes of the censorious "Matron of the British Drama" was wrong. It can hardly be said that this gained her great popularity in her profession or with the public.

But there is no mistake that her ability as an actress was much respected. Her admirable training in the Victorian theatre had made her the mistress of clear speaking and of stage technique, especially in the solidly built play of strong drama and wholesome sentiment. She was not of the temperament that commands fire and passion but she was wonderful in the display of heartbreaking pathos, of dry-eyed suffering and repressed grief. She could be intolerably affecting and she was excellent in comedy, a fact which is sometimes forgotten.

The Elder Miss Blossom and *The Likeness of the Night* were the plays in which she was chiefly known by Edwardian audiences. They served the Kendals well for many years and during the opening of the century they were the principal stand-by in their tours of the provinces and America.

Her acting in *The Elder Miss Blossom* is one of the most touching pieces of acting that I can remember though I was only a schoolboy when I saw her. In this play the story concerned a confusion of names by which an old maid was led to believe that she was the object of a man's devotion and not her young niece who bore the same name. It was an unlikely situation but it gave the actress the opportunity of expressing poignant suffering and she was peerless in that sort of thing.

Audiences were profoundly moved by the tender beauty of her performance as the wronged wife in Mrs. W. K. Clifford's play *The Likeness of the Night*, which plumbed the depths of emotional stress with true sympathy and feminine understanding. The play had all the faults of old-fashioned technique—extravagant use of the soliloquy, broad comic relief and far-fetched coincidence—but the story of husband, wife and mistress, of the meeting of the two women, of the suicide of the wife and the remorse of her rival, was treated with dramatic strength, and Mrs. Kendal drew tears at every performance.

James Agate once told me that it was one of the greatest pieces of acting in his memory. He wrote of it: "Of English actresses I put Mrs. Kendal easily first, if only by virtue of her performance in the third act of Mrs. W. K. Clifford's *The Likeness of the Night*. The scene is the deck of a liner. The wife is going for a sea voyage ostensibly for her health, while the husband is remaining behind ostensibly to work. What he is going to do is to have a fine time with his mistress; what she is going to do is to jump overboard. The husband has a moment of compunction as the boat leaves and takes his wife in his arms. 'He has kissed me!' says Mrs. Kendal as the curtain falls, and the thrill of supreme desolation is with me yet. I remember an earlier scene in which the wife called upon the mistress. Mrs. Kendal's face grew greyer and greyer. Then the wife noticed the toys lying about the room, the doll, the hoop, the ball, and in her eyes were envy of the other woman and lament for her own childlessness. To my mind this was the finest piece of sheer acting that I have ever seen accomplished by an English actress."

And, since women were so deeply affected by the insight and womanly understanding she showed in the part, let me quote a few sentences written by a very able woman critic, Agnes Platt. "Only a writer of first-class skill", she said, "could adequately praise such first-class work. Since Duse's visit here I have seen

nothing to touch it—nothing on the same authentic plane. . . . At last Mrs. Kendal appeared. I was enthralled again. Her quiet manner, her voice which spoke of the awful restraint holding back all emotion, the changing face, the still, cramped, waiting attitude—all wonderful. Then comes the long, heartbreaking agony of Act III. The love she expressed, the broken life, the yearning and the spirit of self-sacrifice—there is but one word for it—perfect, perfect, perfect. . . . One had to piece the scene together again before one could truly appreciate the magnificent actress before one. For magnificent she is. She has no rival in England and only one—the greatest of all—abroad.”

This possibly sounds extravagant but it is typical of the way in which Mrs. Kendal’s acting affected the women among her audiences.

When the century began there were few of the younger actresses who were so much spoken of as Mrs. Patrick Campbell who had sprung from comparative obscurity into sudden fame as Paula Tanqueray when she had appeared with George Alexander in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* and later in *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*. She had followed these striking parts by appearing with Forbes-Robertson and had played such varied roles as Juliet, Lady Teazle, Ophelia, the Rat Wife in *Little Eyolf*, Lady Macbeth and Melisande, before entering into management on her own account.

The significance of this brilliant actress, the impression she made upon the audiences of the 1900s, is difficult to convey in these days when awe, admiration and wonderment are reserved for goddesses of the screen whose talent is only that which has been created for them by the magicians of studio make-up, by film directors and the ingenious agents of film *réclame*. She was a celebrity of exotic glamour, an orchidaceous creature of no common stamp, a star remote that dazzled in the same firmament as Bernhardt, Duse, Réjane and Jane Hading. She was an actress of temperament, of striking, sultry, Latinesque, dark-browed beauty—her mother was Italian—and with a voice of full, rich quality. Her diction was perfect and she could express passion with extraordinary intensity.

“Mrs. Pat” was no ordinary actress and the parts she played were no ordinary women. There was nothing commonplace in her emotional make-up. She could not (or would not) depict the ordinary. When she attempted to do so the balance of the play was wrecked. She could play highly-strung women, women of splendour, magnificence—extravagant creatures who were all nerves and

fascination. Magda, Mrs. Tanqueray, Mrs. Ebbsmith, Fedora—these were all richly coloured beings of intelligence and of complex natures and blazing emotions. All else seemed insipid, pale, colourless and unromantic when she held the stage. She was sumptuous and intensely exciting.

Everyone is aware of what she made of Paula Tanqueray. Less often recalled is her Hedda Gabler which James Agate judged to be her most amazing performance. "For my part", he once wrote, "I found it a wonderful piece of acting to look upon, listen to and think over. It was acting for eyes and ears. It made Hedda a creature of iridescence, amoral and imperious. Those who understood Hedda *à fond* tell me that the actress made the right points and none but the right points in exactly the right way. I remember being perfectly 'convinced' at the time, without being able to find the right words in which to express conviction. But then not even Mr. William Archer has been able to explain the character to us—not even in Norwegian. . . . It was a performance which I could willingly go ten times to see. But that is the way with great players. They give you so very little of their very best."

In 1901 playgoers were being thrilled by the extraordinary emotional performance of a twenty-nine-year-old actress in Henry Arthur Jones's play *Mrs. Dane's Defence*. She was Lena Ashwell, an artist of far different temperament from Mrs. Patrick Campbell, yet one who could most movingly display extreme emotional depths. Her appearance hardly suggested what lay within her scope as an actress. There was little indication that this grave-faced, quiet-mannered and retiring young woman, so typically British in every manner, had within her the power to suggest great passion and stormy emotions. Yet the restraint and reserve which were what one might have expected from her were far from the qualities by which she won her place in the front rank of leading actresses of the day. It was in varying types of errant womanhood that Edwardian playgoers most frequently saw her. "I am the great criminal of the stage," she once said. "I have broken all the commandments. I have committed all the crimes in the calendar. One day I shall write a book—it will be a very small book—and it will be called 'Crimes I Have Not Committed'."

Her versatility was quite remarkable. Within a year or so of playing Mrs. Dane—the character which under the relentless cross-examination of Charles Wyndham provided intense emotional excitement to the famous third act of Henry Arthur Jones's play—

she appeared with Tree as Maslova in *Resurrection*, at His Majesty's Theatre. Who is likely to forget that performance in which she registered the very depths of spiritual and physical degradation as the outcast peasant girl?

She followed this by appearing in *The Darling of the Gods*, in which, under unbecoming Japanese guise, she was miscast. Then came a dramatic triumph in *Leah Kleschna*, an enthralling, passionately emotional melodrama tinged with Tolstoyan sentiment. I remember her as the daughter of an old thief—a part impressively played by Charles Warner—set to rob a popular deputy for whom she had long cherished a romantic hero-worship. She was caught in the act and arrested but released in accordance with his high humanitarian principles. The great scene of the play was her return to her father's home, filled with a passion to lead an honest way of life. I can think of no other actress who could have played this scene with such thrilling and convincing intensity.

She was encouraged by this success to enter into management at the Savoy. She opened with *The Bond of Ninon* which, though not of much account, enabled her, in the part of Ninon de l'Enclos, to show that she had an unsuspected vein of ease and vivacity.

A triumph nearly equal to that of *Mrs. Dane's Defence* came with Claude Askew and Edward Knoblock's play *The Shulamite*. This was a strong drama, the story of Boer life in the eighties, in which Miss Ashwell as the wife of a stern, harsh farmer was awakened to passionate life by her guilty love for a young Englishman. The acting of Norman McKinnel as the farmer, of Henry Ainley as the lover, and of Miss Ashwell, made the play. It had good characterisation and was full of strong emotional scenes. Nothing could have given fuller rein to that repressed power of which Miss Ashwell had such full control. No play of the time aroused so much interest and discussion.

When later she took over the Great Queen Street Theatre, which was renamed the Kingsway, she had the good fortune to discover a new playwright in Anthony Wharton whose first play *Irene Wycherley* was her opening production. Well written, with excellent dialogue and treating a theme of sex interest with directness and sincerity, it gave her exactly the type of part in which she most excelled. She represented a woman of the self-repressed kind baulked for an outlet for her emotions yet eager for surrender. It was a pronounced success and it was followed by *The Swayboat* and by Cecily Hamilton's *Diana of Dobson's*, a comedy of shop-life

with the realistic qualities of the problem play. It was regarded as almost revolutionary in spirit. Miss Ashwell stamped each role with the emotional force of her acting.

One recalls her particularly for the constant beauty of her elocution. She gave every word its right emphasis and inflection and her only fault was that this careful elocution at times inclined to monotony.

One has pleasant memories of so many other gracious ladies—of beautiful Lily Hanbury who was in many of Tree's productions; of gifted Gertrude Kingston who was intellectually inclined; of Annie Hughes; of the soft and gentle charm and appealing womanliness of Winifred Emery who partnered her husband, Cyril Maude, in so many productions; of gracious Kate Rorke, of Fay Davis, of Evelyn Millard who always gave a decorative beauty and grace to costume plays, notably in *The Adventures of Lady Ursula*, *Monsieur Beaucaire*, *Brigadier Gerard* and *Robin Hood*.

During a period when much beauty held the stage there were few actresses more lovely than Lily Brayton, the wife of Oscar Asche with whom she appeared in many Shakesperean parts, with F. R. Benson, with Tree and in her husband's company when he was in partnership with Otho Stuart in seasons at the Adelphi.

I recall her as a spirited Katharine and as one of the most adorable of all the Rosalinds in my experience. Her measured diction she owed to her training as a Bensonian, and if she had a fault it was that she was rather lacking in colour and animation.

She had a natural gift for speaking blank verse, and her voice was very musical. Her calm and classic beauty was admirably suited to the parts she played during the Adelphi seasons. In *Tristram and Iseult* she made a gracious figure as Iseult. In *The Virgin Goddess* she might have stepped from a canvas by Lord Leighton, so truly did she embody the classic ideal of beauty.

One recalls with what fine aristocratic dignity Ellis Jeffreys could grace any Society play, how she adorned such comedies as *Cousin Kate*, *The Marriage of Kitty*, *The Noble Lord* and the many productions of her husband, Herbert Sleath. She was always more duchess-like in bearing than any real-life duchess that one can think of on the spur of the moment.

And in the vein of pure comedy who could be more deliciously droll than Lottie Venne, an engaging little personage whom playgoers long regarded with real affection? Short, plump-figured, round-featured and piquant, she had comedy to her very finger-

tips, due, of course, to her long training in Victorian burlesque. Whether in Pinero or in old English comedy she was superb. Her Mrs. Malaprop in *The Rivals* is a joyous memory.

As that veteran critic, H. M. Walbrook, once remarked, "If Miss Venne had been born a Frenchwoman and had become a Parisian actress she would have been one of the greatest figures of the European theatre, as Mme. Chaumont was in the earlier day. In this dear old England, however, we sometimes love our favourites without having the smallest idea of their real eminence, precisely as we sometimes have to go to a foreign critic to discover how it happens that certain of our dramatists are among the best in Europe. Merely to see Lottie Venne on the stage, parasol in hand, enter a drawing-room and lay her parasol aside as she seats herself, has often been worth the price of one's seat in the pit."

With all of which I agree, except that I do not think Lottie Venne ever lacked the appreciation of English playgoers.

The most remarkable feature of the much-prized volume of which I have spoken is that many of the actresses included therein continued their careers with undiminished and increasing success until well within the experience of a vast number of present-day playgoers, and it is delightful to think how many of them are living at the time of this writing.

There is Eva Moore, for instance. How gentle and sweet she was as Kathie, the innkeeper's daughter in *Old Heidelberg*, and how touching as Klara Volkhardt in the German military play *Lights Out*, at the Waldorf in 1905. I remember how deeply my youthful feelings of sympathy were stirred by her simplicity and distress.

What regal splendour and beauty Constance Collier gave to Tree's productions at His Majesty's where she remained for six years. She was then at the height of her vivid beauty. In *Ulysses* she was truly goddess-like as Athene; in *The Eternal City* she played Roma, the mistress of the Baron Bonelli (Tree) and was as floridly alluring as Poppaea in *Nero*, as she was as Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*. William Archer described her performance in the first-named play as "superb and passionate, interpreting admirably the woman of fierce sensuality yet fiercer ambition". She always gave to such parts a tigress passion and that was very evident when she appeared as Cleopatra. Visually she was splendid. None could have better presented the necessary beauty and sinuosity and with such vigour and naturalness. She was splendid in the display of tantrums in the messenger-scene. Vocally, however, she missed

some of the poetry of the character. There was lacking the haunting music of the lines. Yet one pardoned that for the magnificence to which she rose in the final scene.

In these fierce blazes of passion she dazzled by her very appearance. Far different was the character in which she had one of her greatest and best-remembered triumphs. That was as Nancy in *Oliver Twist*. Here was degradation and squalor and less of conquest by physical beauty, though one recalls her sullen, swarthy handsomeness. Dramatically she was a superb partner to the grimly brutal Sikes of Lyn Harding and the macabre slyness of Tree's Fagin.

Like every proper-minded and susceptible young playgoer I fell in love at first sight with Julia Neilson. She had not been on the stage two minutes as Nell Gwyn before I had surrendered completely to her enchantment. For whether the play was romantic nonsense or not she was always enchanting, a joyous creature abounding in life and high spirits. Tall, commanding, lissom, gay, frolicsome, lovely to look at and just as lovely to hear, she was the ideal partner for her husband Fred Terry. A handsomer pair of lovers never trod the boards or raised rubbish to the plane of pure delight.

It was on the advice of W. S. Gilbert that she gave up her plan for a musical career and took to the stage, a fact which I hope was held in grateful remembrance by her army of worshippers. In the provinces, to which they devoted a great deal of their time, there never was a more popular couple. How many times they were seen in such plays as *Sweet Nell of Old Drury* and *The Scarlet Pimpernel* it would be almost impossible to compute. The public desired to see them in little else.

Sweet Nell was their first production when they went into management at the Haymarket in 1900. There were other plays, of course, during their long partnership but they were very much the same thing. It was with crude costumed romanticism that they won and held their adoring public. They hit upon exactly the kind of entertainment that delighted the vast majority of playgoers and if they never devoted themselves to the purpose of the higher drama their excuse must be the vast pleasure they gave to the public.

Julia Neilson was a romp, a delicious hoyden. In *Dorothy o' the Hall*, a concoction by Paul Kester, she threw dishes out of the window, changed gowns with her maid on the open stage, appeared as a duellist and assumed the guise of Mary Queen of Scots.

Of this diverting display E. A. Baughan wrote: "For Miss Julia Neilson Mr. Paul Kester has invented a character which enables the actress to sound the whole gamut of her talent and of her mannerisms. She is a lady of divine height from whom one would expect dignity and repose. To hear so splendid a creature babble playful baby talk has all the interest of the inappropriate. Miss Neilson did it in *Sweet Nell of Old Drury*, in *Sunday*, in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and she does it again in *Dorothy o' the Hall*. She is the personification of 'charming' waywardness. In this new part Miss Neilson is an amalgam of the Alluring Kitten and Katharina the Shrew. . . . And then she has to be very much in love, as much in love as Rosalind and with the same girlish *naïveté*. In addition there is a slight tincture of Scott's Diana Vernon. You will see that Miss Neilson has a very effective part, made up of her own personality and a gallery of Shakespeare's heroines."

Even William Archer, whose scorn for the romantic trumpery was unequalled among critics, could not resist Miss Neilson's buoyant and abounding skill. "It was impossible", he wrote, "to withhold from her performance a certain measure of admiration. Its force, its flexibility, its exuberant expressiveness were remarkable and even amazing. If only the actress had had anything in nature to express! As it was she expressed nothing in nature but her own overwhelming personality and swept the audience away like a whirlwind in furbelows by the unflagging energy of her attack."

Violet Vanbrugh was always overshadowed by her sister, Irene, but within her limitations she was a gifted actress. Her height, her striking dark good looks, her fine profile and her upright carriage were eminently suited to regal parts so that it is not surprising that her outstanding success was as Queen Katherine in *Henry VIII*.

In this part her "plastic splendour"—excellent phrase—was praised. J. T. Grein wrote of her performance: "Miss Violet Vanbrugh, to the surprise of many, at certain moments struck the veriest note of tragedy. If we remember her frail and sometimes passive in plays of modern life we were all the more struck by her force which became manifest in the very first scene."

So again was her deep-toned Lady Macbeth much praised and indeed in every Shakesperean part she showed accomplishment and the effect of the excellent training she received as a mere girl under Sarah Thorne at the Theatre Royal, Margate where, too, her sister

Irene gained much of her early experience. Both had made their London début in J. L. Toole's company.

Not only was Violet Vanbrugh regal in Shakespeare; she gave distinction to many parts as leading lady to her husband Arthur Bouchier when he was in management at the Garrick and, though her *forte* was in serious and dramatic roles that befitted her stately appearance, she often accomplished a comedy part with considerable success.

Now I have to deal with rival queens of comedy, to attempt some description and appreciation of the allurements so long exercised by two brilliant women whose memories are very dear to the hearts of all playgoers, whose careers began in Victoria's time and whose accomplishments continued to adorn the stage until quite recent years.

I have uneasily postponed the task because not only do I feel unable to do full justice to them and to describe in adequate terms the delight they gave but because I have long hesitated over the order in which to place them. Who is competent to weigh the merits of one against those of the other, of assessing precisely which was the greater artiste? They were so different in style, so alike in the delight they gave to the playgoer. There could be no feeling of partisanship in comparing them. To enjoy intensely the comedy of one was not to say you failed to be charmed by the other.

So let it be on the ground of alphabetical precedence that Marie Tempest shall come first.

She had been appearing as Nell Gwyn in *English Nell* when Edward's reign began and that happened to be her entry into pure comedy and into the kind of part in which she was to shine for so many years.

In 1900 she abandoned the musical stage for ever though she had won extraordinary success from the time she had begun as Fiametta in *Boccaccio* at the Comedy, and for fifteen years she had been a front-rank artiste in operetta and musical comedy. At Daly's she had been starred in *The Geisha*, *A Greek Slave* and *San Toy*. A dispute about a costume in the last-named production led to her break with the George Edwardes management but no doubt she had ambition and confidence in her own powers as a comedy actress and she knew that there was no certain future on the lyrical stage.

Her success in *English Nell* was instant and it was repeated when she appeared in *Becky Sharp* in 1901. By the time she had appeared in *The Marriage of Kitty* it was realised that the stage had gained an

actress of incomparable vivacity and the mistress of a perfect technique. She knew the precise value of every word, the exact point of every situation and every little trick that heightened its effect. She had exquisite diction and a beautiful speaking voice and—such was the effect of her musical training—if, as it often happened, she sat at the piano and trilled some *chanson* then one's delight was doubled.

She had some enchanting mannerisms. How one remembers that delightful and inimitable little squeak of delight or surprise to which her voice would sometimes rise. She had a native wit, a gift of archness and mischief—of malice even. I cannot recall that she ever gave a performance that was not perfect in its polish, whatever the merits of the play. Beyond almost any other actress of her period she made more good plays seem brilliant and more bad plays seem good.

"I'm an ugly little devil," she once said of herself. But that was sheer self-libel. Her looks were certainly not cast in the accepted mould of beauty but her appearance was always delightful. Her round features and her *retroussé* nose gave her a delicious and aggravating piquancy. And always she dressed trimly and in that perfection of taste that could hardly be imitated. She was one of the best-dressed women on the stage and the style was peculiarly her own.

She was, in fact, a dainty rogue in porcelain and it must have been her inspiration that caused A. B. Walkley to coin his favourite descriptive phrase "roguey-poguey", for roguishness was her particular *métier*.

She sparkled with roguishness in the many productions in which she appeared under Charles Frohman's management at the Duke of York's Theatre. She was the perfect artiste for the wit of Somerset Maugham in whose *Mrs. Dot*, in 1908, and *Penelope*, in 1909, she had two of her most engaging parts.

Madcap adventure, impulsiveness, *espièglerie*, sharp wit, effervescence—all these qualities and more she expressed in her inimitable tempestuousness.

No other actress was more typical of the period and more closely identified with its leading playwrights, managements and successes than Irene Vanbrugh whose stage appearances are still so fresh in one's mind. One cannot think that the fame of Barrie and Pinero would have been quite so great had it not been for what this enchanting actress gave to their plays. Nor, I suppose,

would her own fame have been as great had they not provided her with just those parts which no other actress of her time could have interpreted with such spirit, understanding and perfection.

It was in 1901 that she began her thirteen years' connection with Charles Frohman but before that time she had come into the front rank of established stars. She had been on the stage since 1888 but it was Pinero who provided her with her first big opportunity. That was as Rose Trelawny in *Trelawny of the Wells*, a creation of delicious freshness, of the tenderest and most affecting sentiment, of tears and pure joy. Then came Sophie Fullgarney in *The Gay Lord Quex*, and her fame was made. Every year thereafter brought some new success. In 1902 she was Lady Mary Lasenby in Barrie's *The Admirable Crichton*, in 1903 she was Letty Shell in Pinero's *Letty*, in 1905, Amy Grey in Barrie's *Alice Sit-by-the-Fire*, in 1906, Nina in *His House in Order*, in 1907, Marise in Cosmo Gordon Lennox's *The Thief*, in 1908, Dorothy Faringay in Sutro's *The Builder of Bridges*, in 1909, Zoe Blundell in Pinero's *Mid-Channel*. Here was a sequence of personal triumphs rarely equalled by an actress, and few actresses have been called upon to express so many different moods of comedy, sentiment and drama.

Several of the parts provided her with the opportunity to display deep sentiment and pathos, as, for instance, that in *Letty* wherein, as the humble heroine, honourably wooed by a vulgarian but loving a "gentleman" whom she could not marry, and racked by debts and doubts and other distresses, she was an intensely moving figure. Again, her performance in *Mid-Channel* was supremely natural, lifelike and full of genuine feeling. She was always, however, able to preserve a natural balance between comedy and sentiment and that was half the secret of her art.

For all that, gaiety was her most characteristic mood, for joyousness, high spirits, a certain happy-go-luckiness, frankness and abounding good nature were the essence of her very own character.

The roles she played are so many and so varied that it is difficult to select the best of her achievements but I think it will not be disputed that that of Nina marked the peak of her success on the Edwardian stage. For though, on the whole, it was a serious role—the oppressed Nina who was so cruelly victimised in the starchy Ridgeley family, so misjudged and misunderstood, only to emerge triumphant and to sacrifice her opportunity for revenge—it had yet its moments of light-heartedness. What Miss Vanbrugh

had to portray—and she portrayed it so well—was a generous-natured, impulsive, high-spirited, slightly underbred girl, woefully wronged, driven to desperation, eager for justice but controlled by her naturally straight nature—a complex yet thoroughly human character. And how beautifully every phase of the character was shown. She lived the part. But that she always did.

“We must bracket Miss Vanbrugh’s Nina with her Sophy and her Letty”, wrote *The Stage*, “for the nervous intensity, the feverish eagerness, the light-heartedness so painfully repressed, the *joie de vivre* nearly stifled, with which it is endowed and she shared with Mr. Alexander and Mr. Pinero the chief honours of a brilliant *première* in which there is not a discordant note.”

It was part of Miss Vanbrugh’s unfailing accomplishment that she could express so endearingly that slight suggestion of the common, the near-vulgar streak that gave a warm and attractive naturalness to a character. One saw a little of this in her Rose Trelawny and in her Nina and more emphatically in her Sophy, the manicurist. And how good those characters were and what a memory they are.

She had every accomplishment that gave delight and endowed her parts with rare charm—a voice that rang throughout the theatre, a diction that made every word heard, a joyous laugh, a constant buoyancy and a striking gift of facial expression that owed so much of its animation to her large and brilliant eyes.

But above all there was a spaciousness about her personality, a vigour and certainty of attack that made her acting as invigorating as a sea breeze.

XII

PINERO

AT NO PERIOD OF THE ENGLISH THEATRE WERE SO MANY professional playwrights simultaneously engaged as at the beginning of the century. By professional playwrights I mean those writers from whom plays were expected at frequent intervals almost with the regularity of clockwork. In 1901 they included such dramatists as A. W. Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones, J. M. Barrie, Sydney Grundy, R. C. Carton and Alfred Sutro. The number could be swelled if one added to the list those who were employed in other vocations connected with the stage, as, for instance, Bernard Shaw who had been engaged in criticism, unsuccessful novel-writing, politics and other activities while waiting to come into public favour.

The most popular playwright when the century began—in fact, the leading playwright of the period—was Arthur Wing Pinero who, after a spell as an actor, had been writing for the stage since 1877. He had begun with a series of excellent farces, among them *The Magistrate*, *The Schoolmistress* and *Dandy Dick*, turning to sentimentality with *Sweet Lavender*, in 1888. Then, under the influence of Ibsen, he devoted himself to the problem play and social studies with *The Profligate* (1889), *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893), *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* (1895), *The Gay Lord Quex* (1899), with a delightful return to sentimentality in *Trelawny of the Wells* (1898). All these were pronounced successes. *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* was one of the best problem plays of the nineteenth century, just as *Trelawny of the Wells* had not been bettered in its vein of charming sentiment and its character study.

Pinero's position, therefore, was solidly established in 1901. He was the fashionable playwright *par excellence* and no *première* was more eagerly looked to than one of his productions at the St. James's or other leading theatre. His plays during the Edwardian period included *Iris* at the Garrick, in 1901; *Letty* (Duke of York's, 1903); *A Wife Without a Smile* (Wyndham's, 1904); *His House in Order* (St. James's, 1906); *The Thunderbolt* (St. James's, 1908) and *Mid-Channel* (St. James's, 1909).

Of these, *A Wife Without a Smile* was the least successful, and

its production was a mistake. It introduced an incident of questionable taste in the business of a dancing doll which, suspended from the ceiling, indicated that certain amorous business was afoot in the room above. The subsequent controversy aroused was not pleasant. But the other plays were excellent and showed marked development in strength of treatment.

The Thunderbolt, one of his best written pieces, was a realistic study of a group of provincial people and of provincial manners exhibiting a family in their petty ambitions, their narrow outlook, their gossip about local affairs and with all their grasping selfishness. One recalls the hysterical acting of George Alexander in a confession scene and Mabel Hackney's display of emotion as the wife who succumbed to temptation. The comparative failure of the play was due to the fact that it was somewhat before its time. The family so mercilessly depicted was provincial and not of drawing-room society. A snobbish sentiment still prevailed among West End audiences.

Iris had as its heroine a weak girl who embraced a life of vice out of sheer love of luxury. It was a sombre and interesting drama, as the *Illustrated London News* critic remarked, "with the transcendental virtue of courage it moves in the later acts more rapidly, almost brutally, to a conclusion which is as right as it is unexpected. Iris's situation is not solved by the conventional device of Mrs. Tanqueray's suicide, Mrs. Ebbsmith's conversion and Mrs. Fraser's benediction. Rejected by the youthful fiancé she has deceived, turned out of doors by the hot-blooded millionaire whose protection she has accepted for money, she disappears into the night, and her fate, you say, is the harsh justice, the cruel logic of life. Indeed there is palpitating drama in many of Mr. Pinero's scenes: the passionate farewell of the lovers and their painful later meeting, the animal rage of the rich Spanish Jew as he nearly strangles his mistress and at the play's end nearly wrecks her pretty home."

It was this play in which Fay Davis played Letty, and Oscar Asche as Maldonado, Letty's Jewish protector, acted with such alarming animal force in an Othello-like role.

Again, *Letty* offered a certain degree of grim realism in a poignant study of humble life. Letty Shell, honourably courted by a vulgarian and loving a gentleman who was not prepared to marry her, racked by debts, doubts and illness, was a pathetic figure throughout the play and it was one of Irene Vanbrugh's most affecting feats of acting. E. F. Spence, in the *Westminster Gazette*, wrote: "In the main it is a masterly drama rich in humour,

a little painful in character, marked by hundreds of skilful touches of craftsmanship and, above all, amazingly strong in the depiction of human beings." Yet it is not to be reckoned among Pinero's successes.

Mid-Channel showed an increasing insight and strength and it marked Pinero's endeavour to keep abreast with the times and to take his place among those playwrights who were turning from drawing-room artificialities to social problems. It was a study of a childless marriage and a searching analysis of the conditions that make for selfishness and unhappiness in the Smart Set, of the circumstances which cause a married couple to drift apart when they have reached middle-age. It had sincerity and genuine seriousness of purpose but it did not have the success it deserved.

"I cannot get away from the conviction", wrote J. T. Grein, "that my brethren have not meted out that justice to *Mid-Channel* which is their wont. Granted that the play is unpleasant, its hue is sombre, its length abnormal, its characters do not appeal to our sympathy—and to the average Englishman the idea of unhappiness engendered by enforced childlessness is one that leaves a nasty taste behind—granted all this, but when you take the book in hand, or when you remember the production you cannot help being struck by the unity of purpose by which this work was created, by the veracity of the picture of the seamy side of life, by the stern moral which it teaches, above all by the mastery of craft with which it is constructed. . . . It is worthy to rank as intellectual drama among the finest. . . ."

But Pinero's most notable play of the period was *His House in Order*. It was one of the outstanding successes of his long career and the subject of an almost unparalleled amount of discussion in the Press. On the whole its reception by the critics was as enthusiastic as the response of the public who were greatly attracted by the story of the persecuted Nina (Irene Vanbrugh) who suffered so bitterly in her treatment by the starchy Ridgeley family. In the opinion of William Archer, "It moves from strength to strength and is always defeating our expectations and only to outdo them. This is great drama. To other authors we may turn for brilliant pamphlets or exquisite fairy tales but for great drama we still have to go to Mr. Pinero."

This opinion was echoed by *The Stage* which remarked that the play "should take rank as dramatic literature with the greatest of this consummate playwright's work".



Scene in the first production of *Peter Pan*, Duke of York's Theatre, 1904.



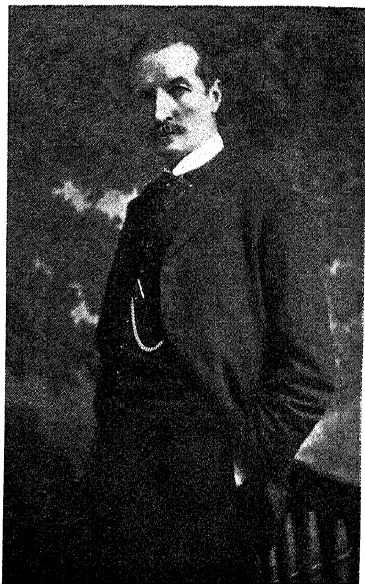
H. B. IRVING and IRENE VANBRUGH
in *The Admirable Crichton*, Duke of York's
Theatre, 1902.



SEYMOUR HICKS and ELLALINE
TERRISS in *Quality Street*, Vaudeville
Theatre, 1902.



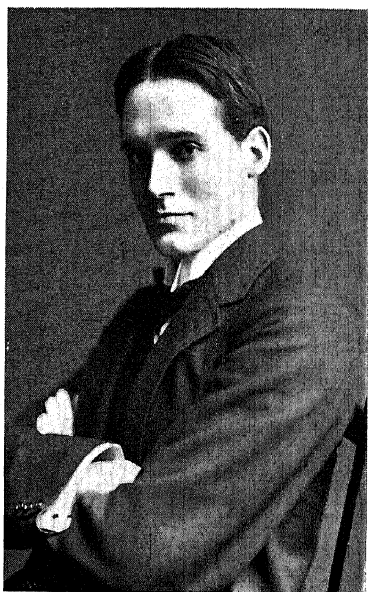
GEORGE EDWARDES.



WILLIAM ARCHER.



ARTHUR COLLINS.



H. GRANVILLE-BARKER.

On the other hand the usually urbane E. A. Baughan acidly took sides against Archer with whom he carried on a lengthy exchange of views in the *Daily News*. He spoke of "mechanical devices" and said, among other things, "Mr. Pinero understands the value of crude contrasts. His Ridgeleys are pharisees expressed in the terms of farce. Their actions and their speeches are alike unnatural. The dialogue hides rather than reveals character and, strange as it may seem, that is the secret of Mr. Pinero's hold over his audience. He understands rhetoric and he also understands how to use his characters so that an emotional climax may be built up. That is a great gift. Mr. Pinero does not display it, however, with subtlety but with the deliberate intention of creating emotional scenes in which his characters are merely mouthpieces. That is not great drama but evidently it makes for popularity."

The most violent critic of the play, however, was Frank Harris who, in the *Pall Mall Gazette* spoke of its "hideous and immoral ending" and of its dialogue as "wooden, and common and incorrect", adding, "Mr. Pinero has a real knowledge of stage effect, and for the rest he is on the intellectual level of the Ridgeleys, and the audience who applauded the providential interpositions and the ending of the play which might be called 'the Massacre of the Innocents'."

In the end, however, it was the Pineroites who had the best of the argument.

But it must be said that there was a great deal of truth in what the critics on the other side had to say. Pinero was a superb craftsman and a master of stage technique, and he was the most skilled inventor of the "well-made" play of the Sardouesque kind that the English stage had known up to his period. He was too intelligent a writer not to be aware of current trends and influences and he did seriously attempt to range himself with those who were introducing new ideas into the theatre, replacing artificiality and convention with a more realistic treatment. But he was not able to free himself wholly from the bonds of the fashionable drama. His best plays, however earnest in theme and intention, were all skilfully contrived to introduce the *scene à faire*, an emotional climax to fit the needs of the star artistes. However much disguised as natural outcome of events, such scenes were obviously there because that was what the public expected when there were artistes like George Alexander and Irene Vanbrugh in the casts.

It must be remembered that Pinero had had a long training as

an actor and that he always had the actor—and particularly the actress—in view when he wrote a play. That is why he always wrote good acting parts. Even the smaller roles were given a touch of character and were given something good to say. He knew the precise value of an effective speech and he knew exactly where to place it.

Though some of his characters were stock types rather than genuine studies of character he did manage to endow many of them with human quality. I do not see why it is always considered necessary to drag in the name of Ibsen in order to disparage Pinero. I do not consider that all Ibsen's plays had universality of theme. Some of them strike me as marking Ibsen no less parochial in his outlook than Pinero. Moreover, many of Ibsen's characters are types and symbols and abstract ideas rather than individual creatures, whereas many of Pinero's are recognisable human beings whatever part they are forced to play in some intricate pattern or situation.

Pinero's greatest defect was that he was curiously lacking in a perceptive ear for colloquial English. His male characters were too prone to express themselves in portentous, polysyllabic speech. Too frequently there were passages in his dialogue which sounded as though they had been written by a *Daily Telegraph* leader-writer of the period.

Take, for instance, how the caddish Letchmere, a cold-blooded sensualist, expresses himself when he advises the wretched Letty that she had better marry the commonplace Mandeville. She falters, "I—I thought you were interested in me." To which Letchmere solemnly replies :

"I am and in a way I could hardly have imagined possible ; so interested in you am I that I find myself—I admit to my intense surprise—counselling you to balance carefully the claims of this eligible bucket-shop keeper against the dubious advantages of a continued friendship with an individual who is a bachelor only in his way of living."

Again, it is Letty, a simple typist, who expresses herself in this stilted fashion to some of her companions :

"To my imperfect intelligence, it seems that the first essential is to be capable of resigning oneself to a scheme of things which ordains that some women shall spend their lives in perpetual fog, while others—our more fortunate sisters, as they are styled—enjoy freedom and luxury galore."

On the other hand, though many passages were extremely formal in expression they were, from a theatrical point of view, enormously effective when spoken by such an actress as Irene Vanbrugh. There is Nina's famous defiance when she turns in anger against the hated Ridgeley family :

" Ah yes, there's one bit of revenge I can take ; there's one slight I can put upon you ! I go to no park to-morrow ; as God hears me I do not ! There's no possible indignity that hasn't been heaped upon me ; and in return I'll show my contempt—show it publicly by my absence !—my contempt for your park and those connected with it ! Good night ! ”

And again, when, having discovered the letters disclosing the guilt of her husband's first wife, she triumphantly tells Hilary Jesson :

" She shall crawl to me—Geraldine shall—as I've crawled to her ; and you're right—she shall make them all crawl. Hilary—Mr. Jesson—often and often I've cried myself to sleep, after being tormented by Geraldine almost beyond endurance, cried half through the night. Now it's her turn if she has a tear in her. *She* shall be meek and grovelling now, to *me*—consulting *my* wishes, *my* tastes, in everything ; taking orders from me, and carrying them out like a paid servant . . . I've got her ! I've got her, and she shan't leave me till I choose to dismiss her. Oh, she has tortured me—tortured me—she and her tribe ; and from to-day— You watch ! You watch ! ”

Now that, I take it, is anger, indignation, a sense of burning wrong, a flaming exultation, superbly and naturally expressed, and it is just how an emotional woman at the boiling point might speak in given circumstances.

Hilary Jesson's plea to Nina to forego her thirst for revenge, however, rings not at all naturally. The speech allotted to the leading man—that charming, elderly *raisonneur*—is expressed with characteristic Pineroesque formality :

" I know your position is a difficult one ; a hard one, in many respects ; and the temptation which assails you this morning is a temptation few could resist. Still, *do* resist it. . . . Nina, there are some people walking the earth who are wearing a halo. It's invisible to you and me ; *we* can't see it ; but it's there, round their brows, none the less. . . . They are the people who have made sacrifices ; who've been tempted and have conquered. . . . They are the people who have *renounced*. Nina, be among those who wear a halo.”

All the same I recall this as one of the most theatrically moving passages of the play, or, for that matter, of any play I have seen.

Some critics acclaimed Pinero as the most accomplished craftsman of the English theatre since Shakespeare's day. Well, perhaps he was. He was certainly the link between the Victorian drama and the pseudo-realism of T. W. Robertson and the twentieth-century renaissance, and his plays, studied from first to last, will be seen to be coloured at both extremes by current influences and trends of thought. "He was the brilliant and even daring pioneer of a great movement," writes the admiring Archer. "So far as any man can be called the regenerator of the English drama that man is Arthur Wing Pinero."

XIII

CHIEFLY HENRY ARTHUR JONES

THE NAME OF HENRY ARTHUR JONES IS ALWAYS COUPLED WITH that of Pinero and indeed they were so long contemporary playwrights and so long engaged in the production of plays that accorded with the tastes and conventions of the fashionable West End theatre, that the association and the comparison between them is inevitable.

Jones was five years older than Pinero and his output of plays was as considerable and as continuous as that of his rival. If ever there was a born playwright it was he. Unlike Pinero he had no stage training but his technical ability and skill in constructing a story were remarkable. It seems extraordinary that a man of his upbringing should have made such a mark in the theatre. He came of sound Nonconformist yeoman stock and early in his life he was engaged in the drapery trade. But the playwriting instinct will out. His first play was produced in 1879 and by the time the new century had arrived he had made a considerable name for himself with such successes as *The Silver King*, *Saints and Sinners*, *The Middleman*, *Judah*, *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, *The Liars* and *Mrs. Dane's Defence*. An imposing list. If he had gone no further his name would still be known as one who had helped greatly in the renaissance of English playwriting.

His earlier plays were mostly excellent melodramas but later he turned to drawing-room comedy and the satirical study of manners, an almost unending succession of pieces marked by sound craftsmanship, considerable humour and ability in character drawing.

His ear for the niceties of speech was more accurate than that of Pinero though his technique was less expert. It is hard to find in his dialogue that portentousness of expression that is Pinero's occasional defect. He could wring the last drop of drama out of a situation and even Pinero never devised a more effective scene than that in the famous third act of *Mrs. Dane's Defence* wherein Sir Daniel Carteret by merciless questioning wrings the confession from the hapless Mrs. Dane.

From the nineties Jones developed considerably, and having turned out many entertaining comedies of intrigue, he did valiantly

attempt to use the drama as a criticism of life, with a particular penchant for flaying shams and hypocrisies.

As *The Stage* once wrote of him: "Mr. Jones has an idea, and he works it out, or a character and he develops it, or both: no piece is too light or too slight to be marked with originality and freshness, a real sense of intrigue, telling dialogue and adroit situation. He may, in his humorous plays, have been over-fond of the theme of the apparently compromised wife and the after query: Was he guilty? or How far did her indiscretion go? but granting so much the variations thereon have been very ingenious."

Jones took himself and his profession very seriously. He deemed himself a thinker, but though he engaged in controversy and was apt to make forthright pronouncements on many questions he was not a thinker of very great profundity or originality, and with his conservative outlook he failed to keep abreast of the times and with the vast social changes around him. Nor did he ever entirely rid himself of the conventions of the theatre of his earlier days. There was a smack of melodrama and of the contrived situation in most of what he wrote. Such artificiality, however, was often redeemed by vigour in writing and the effectiveness of his satire.

Much of his most notable work was accomplished before the century began. Undoubtedly the best of the plays that followed was *The Hypocrites*, produced in New York in 1906 and in London the following year. It marked a return to serious drama and was a representation of English life coloured by romantic convention. Concerning the production of this piece in London the *Illustrated London News* critic wrote: "Mr. Jones who is intolerant of so many of the hypocrisies of British respectability has never shaken off—in the playhouse at least—the tradition of our burgess class that sex relations and sex failings are the most important things in life and that a sin against the current code of sexual morality is the most flagrant of social offences. Hence his comedies have generally a married or single woman's indiscretion as the basis; his serious plays generally turn on a seduction treated romantically. Only playgoers therefore ignorant of Mr. Jones's career would complain because his latest play is concerned with a girl's betrayal and because its hero is an idealistic clergyman who champions a girl's cause and insists fanatically on the *amende* of matrimony, any more than because the playwright draws a drab and repellent picture of the society of an English country town. What ought to challenge admiration is the skill with which Mr. Jones unfolds his theme and

the brilliant dramatic surprises of his play's third act. This act offers us the spectacle of righteousness at bay and seemingly overpowered by unsuspected events."

Chance the Idol (1902) was a kind of dramatic sermon about a young woman who tries to make a fortune at the casino in order to purchase from an unfaithful and runaway lover his fulfilment of a broken promise of marriage. One critic described it as "a poignant melodramatic tale which shines with a vivid human interest; illuminating the finely conceived and consistently wrought figure of a woman at once ennobled and made piteous by her passion, and the obsession through which it is expressed". Anthony L. Ellis, in *The Star*, considered it a play in which a great parade of profundity disguised a sentimental melodrama tricked out elaborately to resemble a problem play—a description that might have been applied to many of Jones's pieces.

The Princess's Nose (1903), in which H. B. Irving, Irene Vanbrugh and Gertrude Kingston appeared, had a curious theme, for it concerned a wife who unashamedly joked over the broken nose of a formidable and almost successful royal rival.

Whitewashing Julia (1903), with Irene Vanbrugh and Arthur Bourchier in the cast, showed how a small provincial coterie made a dead set against a lady touched by scandalous rumour. It was a return to a lighter vein and it was one of his flimsiest pieces.

Joseph Entangled (1904) described a matrimonial scandal in high life. Not since *The Liars* had the author made such entertaining use of a familiar theme. Some critics found it a trifle indelicate and complained of "an undesirable taint of the Divorce Court". That taint, by the way, was always more or less to be detected in many of Jones's lighter plays.

The Chevalier (1904) was a one-part comedy-farce in which Arthur Bourchier revelled in a cheap-jack exuberance.

In *Dolly Reforming Herself* (1908) Jones returned to the vein of light comedy but he avoided his customary theme of marital infidelity, instead making a quarrel scene between husband and wife the most amusing highlight of the occasion.

To my mind the pleasantest play of this later period was *The Heroic Stubbs* (1906), for it had some claim to originality in its picture of the idealistic little Bond Street bootmaker (earning £4,000 a year, by the way) whose life is influenced and exalted by his devotion to a society beauty. However, apart from the character of the heroic bootmaker which provided such an excellent part for

James Welch, it was very much of a rehash of material used in earlier comedies.

Up to the end of 1910 Jones had written nearly fifty plays, but there is no doubt that the best of his work had been seen during the Victorian period. Between 1902 and 1910 he provided twelve plays for the stage and it was generally remarked by the critics that most of them showed a marked decline from his earlier successes. He had yet a considerable productive period before him but though he continued to be a popular playwright he was not intellectually equipped to compete on equal terms with the oncoming school of playwrights. He was hopelessly outclassed by Shaw, Galsworthy, Granville-Barker and Barrie and by the later Pinero and presently, still active in output, he dropped into the rear.

There can be no doubt about his inferiority to his early rival. While there is still life in several of Pinero's plays—providing an adequate cast is available—there is hardly one of Jones's plays, with the exception of *Mrs. Dane's Defence*—that is worthy of revival.

Summing up the achievements of 1907 the *Stage Year Book* named Alfred Sutro as "one of our strongest forces in dramatic authorship" and named his *John Glayde's Honour* as the best play of the year. His plays, it said, "are clever in idea and treatment, emotional, suggestive and stimulating, often very fresh in their outlook, yet his men and women show a certain want of nature against which Mr. Sutro has need to be on his guard".

Sutro was a minor Pinero and no doubt he considered himself as a critic of social life. But the criticism he expressed in his many plays found its material only within a limited social circle and was marred by the current sentimentalism of the period. An anonymous writer dealing with *The Perfect Lover* (1905) summed him up pretty well :

"Mr. Sutro", he wrote, "is at the present moment so successful a playwright that it is interesting to try to analyse the particular theses which he hopes to set down in his plays. He is apparently ambitious in the way of being a moralist; he is obviously anxious to demonstrate that a strict sense of virtue is only compatible with a limited income, that the Colonies are the abode of honesty; that wickedness is inevitably interwoven with wealth and, incidentally, that the perfect lover must be a perfect fool. He has a strong sense of what is theatrically effective, a faculty for writing smart dialogue and a clever instinct for what will excite popular discussion. Super-

ficially he is a considerable dramatist, and if greatness be judged by success he is a great dramatist; but it is still open to question whether fine drama can be so avowedly written to please an audience and not to please a writer's artistic conscience."

Sutro's principal plays during the period included *The Walls of Jericho* (1904), *Mollentrave on Women* and *The Perfect Lover* (1905), *The Fascinating Mr. Vanderveldt* (1906), *John Glayde's Honour*, *The Barrier* (1907) and *The Builder of Bridges* (1908).

The play by which he is chiefly remembered is, of course, *The Walls of Jericho* which brought him into the front rank of dramatists and after that no season went by in which he did not contribute to West End production. But however ambitious in theme none of them achieved such sensational success as did the full-blooded society comedy in which Arthur Bourchier found an ideal part.

He was Jack Frobisher, an Australian ex-squatter who, having made his pile, came to England and married a titled woman. After enduring the luxuries, shams and frivolities of the Smart Set, the perversities and extravagances of his beautiful and not entirely unworthy wife, his patience gives way. He resolves to desert Society and to go back to the primitive virtues of Australia but not before he has expressed moral indignation in the most sensational terms, bringing down the walls of Jericho (or rather of Belgravia) with some tremendous speeches. It was certainly a rousing play. The Press praised it and Belgravia enjoyed it (and the splendid acting of Arthur Bourchier and Violet Vanbrugh) as much as did the rest of the delighted public. One enthusiastic critic hailed it as the play which had raised the stage from the slough of despond into which it had been sinking.

Sutro assuredly knew how to write strong, vigorous and theatrically effective dialogue. Here is a sample. It is a passage in which Jack Frobisher expresses his view of fashionable society to his friend Hanky Bannister:

JACK: If you want to be happy, I'll tell you what you should do. Keep a thousand a year for yourself and give the rest of the money to the Trustees for the National Debt.

HANKY (*roaring*): Who's mad now?

JACK: I came home with a pile five years ago. I felt just as you feel. I wanted to get into the Smart Set; I liked to shake hands with them, go to their houses and belong to their class. Well, I did it all and you can do it; I lost my money at billiards and cards and betting

and the winners liked me because I lost. I spent my afternoons lending fivers and tenners to younger sons ; anyone who wanted money had only to come to me, and they did come, men and women ! I gave lunches, dinners, suppers—theatre parties, race parties, river parties, and divided a great many thousands among a handful of idle men and women who tolerated me because I provided them with amusement. And then, just as the taste of it was beginning to pall, I fell in love and married. That was my one stroke of luck ! My wife has a head and a heart ; and if she hadn't the misfortune to be the daughter of that exquisite old dodderer she would be a fine woman.

HANKY : She's very beautiful.

JACK : Yes, but she is more than beautiful—she has a soul. Only she has been brought up in this miserable set—where the women do nothing but gamble, bet and flirt and talk scandal and she can no more shake herself free from them than you and I can become gentlemen and talk with an infernal drawl. We've a little son but it's considered bad form to bother about your baby. It's bad form to think, or feel, or have an idea ; you must make love to every woman you meet, or else she votes you a bore. You must wear the same grin on your face from morning to night ; you mustn't be what you are, you mustn't *be* at all ; you must resemble the others, dance with the others, laugh with the others, or if you don't they call you extreme and say you're a crank.

And here is a passage from the big scene in which Jack Frobisher explodes with indignation and tells his wife, the Lady Alethea, what he thinks of her set :

JACK (*with growing vehemence*) : I've had enough of these companions of yours, these wretched, sexless women who do nothing but flirt and gamble, these childless wives who grudge the time that it costs them to bring a baby into the world. I've had enough of their brainless, indecent talk, where everything good is turned into ridicule, and each word has a double meaning. I've had enough of this existence of ours, in town and country, where all men make love to their neighbours' wives. I've done with it—done with it all—and so have you.

Finally Jack Frobisher has this to say :

“ Well, I say to hell with all this ! You're my wife, not my mistress ; I married because I wanted a mate and a partner and I'm tired of the life we've led, in which we've been neither. And so we'll go back we two ; we'll leave this rotten West End, we'll go back to Nature and start things all over again.”

John Glayde's Honour, which was so highly praised in 1907, was strong drama on the theme of a man neglecting his wife while

making a fortune, only to discover that she had found consolation elsewhere in a fascinating artist. It was carried through by neat stage-craft, some unflinching realism and by excellent acting on the part of George Alexander and by Eva Moore as the wife.

The Perfect Lover was sentimental drama, *The Builder of Bridges* the story of the affection aroused in a high-minded engineer (George Alexander) by a girl who had set out to deceive him. *The Illustrated London News* described it as ingenious but artificial, adding, "Its author seems qualifying for the position of an English Sardou but unfortunately it is the Sardou of later and vicious days. He provides theatrical effect only by the distortion of human nature. The hero is one of those intensely honourable business men which it seems Mr. Alexander's function just now to impersonate."

The Fascinating Mr. Vanderveldt was an exercise in the manner of Henry Arthur Jones. It was not a success. Most critics found the lady-killing Mr. Vanderveldt of Arthur Bouchier far from fascinating and it was complained that it was very milk-and-watery Sutro which would have been far less wearisome if the story had been on the same level as part of its treatment. For, in whatever his plays, Sutro generally managed to write with grace and wit and he knew the value of a stage situation. As J. T. Grein wrote of him: "It is not in his nature to be gay and flippant. His humour is germane to sarcasm. He is never so happy as when, in a subject of substance, he can inveigh against the craze or malady of the age." Hence it is that *The Walls of Jericho* represented him at his best.

R. C. Carton was a very successful playwright in the lighter vein. Like Pinero he had been an actor and, having in the early nineties turned out many sentimental pieces in the style of T. W. Robertson, he developed a maturer and more sophisticated style. Towards the end of the century he had produced such clever and successful comedies as *Lord and Lady Algy*, *Wheels Within Wheels* and *Lady Huntworth's Experiment* which were all the more entertaining because they permitted the author's wife, Miss Compton, to display that inimitable vein of comedy so much due to her drawling utterance.

Carton's most successful productions during the Edwardian period were *Mr. Hopkinson* (1905) and *Public Opinion* (1906). The first was a comedy written round a Kipps-like character, a part played to perfection by James Welch in just that blend of the

comic and the wistfully pathetic that was so characteristic of that excellent comedian.

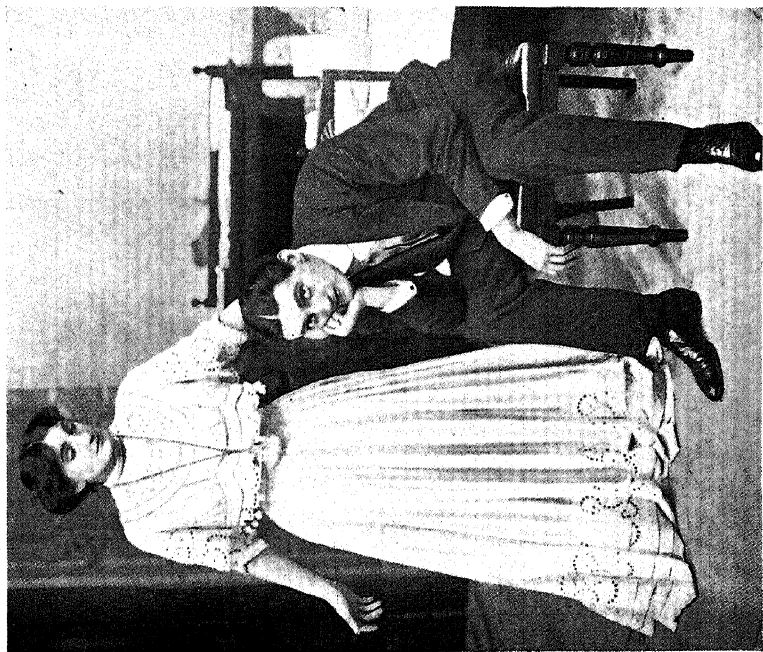
Public Opinion was a clever and witty farce concerning a music-hall comedienne and five eminent men—two peers, a judge, a lawyer and a physician—whom she had somehow managed to compromise and one of whom, with blackmailing designs, she was anxious to marry. It was delightfully acted by Miss Compton, Annie Hughes (as the music-hall star), Fred Kerr, Henry Kemble and George Giddens.

In most of his comedies Carton displayed engaging wit. He attempted no epigrammatic displays. He wrote, as someone observed, with the fascinating ease of a man of the world.

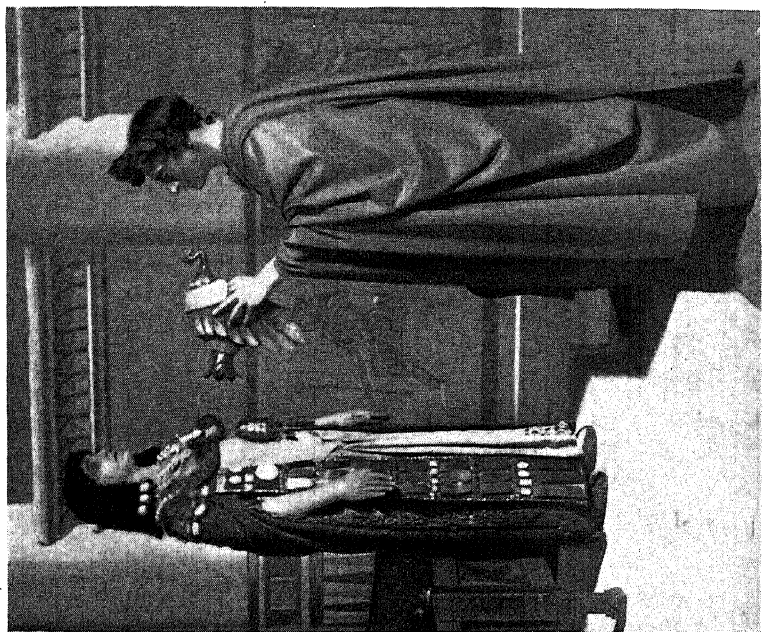
Great hopes were aroused when *Mrs. Gorrings's Necklace* and *Cousin Kate* were produced in 1903. The author was Hubert Henry Davies. He was only thirty-four and it was evident that here was a new writer of great promise who displayed a light grace of style in comedies perilously slight in theme but full of freshness, elegance and dexterity. The two comedies were followed by *Captain Drew on Leave* (1906) and *The Mollusc* (1907). The latter, his most successful comedy, if not in charm at least in regard to technical skill, was a four-character piece, as usual, without discernible plot. It must be acknowledged that his deftness in sustaining interest and delight in the study of a selfish woman with an instinct for getting other people to wait upon her and saving her from the slightest exertion, was due as much to the acting of Mary Moore (the "mollusc"), Charles Wyndham, Sam Sothorn and Elaine Inescourt, as to the author's own skill. The principal parts fitted Wyndham and Mary Moore to perfection. They were exactly modelled to suit their individual styles.

That, alas! was the tragedy of Hubert Henry Davies. The young author who wrote dialogue with such distinctive charm, who could contrive comedy out of the flimsiest substance and sustain the interest by technical dexterity, had fallen wholly and completely a victim to the worst effects of the actor-manager system. His comedies were all written in the made-to-measure style. His prime concern was to fit recognised stars with suitable parts. He did not belong to the old order of playwrights. He was young and undoubtedly had latent powers capable of producing greater things. But those powers were never developed. He died young and, it is said, a disappointed man.

H. V. Esmond, actor and husband of Eva Moore, was a prolific



LILLAH MCCARTHY and HENRY AINLEY in *You Never Can Tell*, Court Theatre, 1906.



GERTRUDE ELLIOTT and J. FORBES-ROBERTSON in *Cæsar and Cleopatra*, Savoy Theatre, 1907.



LAWRENCE RAY and RUTH VINCENT in *Veronique*, Apollo Theatre, 1904.



HAYDEN COFFIN and ADA REEVE in *Butterflies*, Apollo Theatre, 1904.



HAYDEN COFFIN and DAN ROLYAT in *Tom Jones*, Apollo Theatre, 1907.

provider of entertaining sentimental comedies of no great substance, among which were *The Wilderness* and *The Sentimentalist*, both produced in 1901. Cosmo Gordon Lennox produced some entertaining trifles including *The Marriage of Kitty* (1902) which he adapted from the French and in which Marie Tempest (then his wife) gave one of her most sparkling performances. And there was Captain Robert Marshall whose best comedy, *The Duke of Killiecrankie* was produced in 1904 with Weedon Grossmith, Marie Illington, Eva Moore and Graham Browne in the cast.

Marshall had distinct style and considerable humour, a fact which provided E. F. Spence with the substance of a delightful essay when he wrote about the production in the *Westminster Gazette*.

"The success of the work", he said, "will be due to its author's great gift for making jokes; he has abandoned, fortunately, the sentimentality of his Haymarket plays, but alas! does not display the touch of originality that distinguished his two farcical comedies at the Court Theatre. The play is slight farce, innocent of attempt at ingenuity of construction or plausibility of intrigue, but noteworthy for the quantity of jokes. Considering the quantity the standard is surprisingly high. . . . It is observable that the Marshall joke has no specific character; one could, I fancy, identify a Pinero, a Henry Arthur Jones or a Carton witticism but the Marshall's seem what lawyers would call jokes in gross—which, of course, is quite a different thing from gross jokes—though one or two were accepted quite wrongfully perhaps, as belonging to the 'knuckle' species: it must be added that these were cryptic to the virtuous and possibly quite innocent. Some belong to what one may call the Christy Minstrel order, and suggest that aid to the corner-man; some were as obvious as Oxford Street; some were flagrant chestnuts . . . and some were very clever and even subtle."

Another and more serious side to Captain Marshall's talent was revealed in *The Alabaster Staircase*, at the Comedy Theatre in 1906, the short run of which can be attributed mainly to the fact that it was in advance of its time. It had a distinguished cast, including John Hare, Lottie Venne, Leslie Faber, Arthur Playfair and Sybil Carlisle. It was a comedy touched with fantasy and satire, a kind of modernised version of Hare's favourite play, *A Pair of Spectacles*. It concerned a Prime Minister who, falling down a staircase, received a knock on the head which completely changed his mental outlook. He had been a hard, selfish, class-conscious Tory of the old school,

but after the accident and on the eve of his resignation he addressed some of the startled members of his Cabinet in these terms :

“ I want to see an absolutely independent Parliament. I want to see constituencies elect the best men to represent them, irrespective of any one party issue. I want to see a House of Commons so constituted, elect its own ministers. Then for the first time we shall have the real brains—the business brains—of the country at Westminster, and not a flock of political sheep who only know into which pen to trot when the division bell rings. . . . Of late I’ve seen much of the working men and women in this world of London, and I tell you that they show in their lives graces of mind, of generosity, of unselfishness, of true humanity that we, as a class, cannot match and have no conception of. And watching this quite unconscious fineness of heart and courage in a life of incredible struggle I felt that I understood for the first time the words ‘ He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away. . . . ’ After years of blindness I reach out towards the light, after years of promoting the well-being of the few, I now more honestly and ardently desire the well-being of the many. And to that end I dedicate my career, my means and whatever strength and energy I can command.”

This scene was described by one astonished critic as one of the most audacious that any dramatist had ever attempted on the stage. Another, even more appalled, denounced the play as an attempt to thrust cheap politics upon the multitude by preaching easy philanthropy and false social economy.

No doubt the fashionable audience at the Comedy were even more dismayed. To hear such revolutionary and subversive sentiments expressed by a fashionable actor in a West End theatre was something entirely new. It was the sort of thing that one might have expected to hear at the Court Theatre, no doubt, for there Shaw and Galsworthy in their eccentric plays were expressing all kinds of alarming views and doctrines. What *could* the theatre be coming to ? Little wonder that Captain Marshall’s play had short shrift.

XIV

BARRIE, MAUGHAM—AND HALL CAINE

EARLY IN THE NEW CENTURY MANY OF THE LATE VICTORIAN playwrights were becoming a trifle *démodé*, among them Sydney Grundy and Haddon Chambers. Henry Arthur Jones had achieved his best work and Pinero, as I have shown, contributed a great deal more that was to add to his eminence. But whatever loss there was in the decline of those who had led the way was amply compensated for in the arrival of a promising new school of dramatists, so many of whom were influenced to an extent by Ibsen. They were the advance guard of the intellectual movement and were led notably by Shaw, Galsworthy and Harley Granville-Barker. But as they were so inextricably involved with the famous Vedrenne-Barker management at the Court Theatre (1904-07) I must postpone dealing with their plays until I arrive at the subject.

But there is one playwright who, owing nothing to Ibsen (except, perhaps, an apology for having written *Ibsen's Ghost*, a skit upon the master in his early days), not at all affected by the new current of thought in the theatre and very little concerned with social problems, stands absolutely and uniquely alone in his own field. That was J. M. Barrie who, between 1902-10, gave the theatre *Quality Street*, *The Admirable Crichton*, *Little Mary*, *Peter Pan*, *Alice Sit-by-the-Fire*, *What Every Woman Knows*, as well as one or two one-act trifles.

Barrie was an out-and-out sentimentalist who dwelt in romanticism, whimsicality and fantasy. Many have found his sentimentalism too saccharine and cloying, his mental outlook too much coloured by optimism, a vague, unrealistic idealism and a kind of deliberate and roguish charm. It is true that most of his plays, as we now look back on them, do give ground for these reproaches but what must be acknowledged even by those who regard him as reactionary, is his superb craftsmanship, the mastery of dramatic form in which he chose to cast his plays, his almost uncanny insight into feminine psychology, his humour and the imagination in which he expressed an idea.

Reactionary? Absurd! I should like to know in what way. Nobody had previously attempted to enter into his field. He

created his method and his style and he expressed his own ideas with his own particular whimsical fancy. They came as something absolutely fresh and enchanting to Edwardian playgoers who had been so liberally provided with the comedy of intrigue and with so-called "problem" plays. And was he so much out of touch with the current life around him? Was there not a suggestion of social criticism in some of his plays?

There certainly was in *The Admirable Crichton* which was given to a delighted public at the Duke of York's Theatre in 1902 with a cast including H. B. Irving, Irene Vanbrugh, Henry Kemble, Gerald du Maurier and Sybil Carlisle, and ran for 328 performances.

What Barrie had previously done in the pretty sentimentalism of *The Professor's Love Story* and *The Little Minister* hardly prepared one for the ingenuity, the touch of genius even, in this Robinson Crusoe story of the Earl of Loam's family cast away on a desert island, the pleasing fantasy of imagination whereby it was Crichton, the perfect butler, who became the masterful controller of the situation. And what humour there was in the circumstances by which the aristocratic members of the family were shown as useless and helpless creatures subservient to the will of the inventive and resourceful butler. And then the superb satire of the *dénouement*—the resumption of the old social order when the party was rescued after Crichton, lord of all he surveyed, had condescended to stoop to marry the Earl's daughter. Barrie was fortunate in finding so dominating and excellent a Crichton in H. B. Irving.

Only a few months previously *Quality Street* had been produced at the Vaudeville Theatre with Seymour Hicks as the dashing Valentine Brown, Ellaline Terriss as Phoebe Throssell and Marion Terry as her elder sister, Susan. A Dresden china piece this, a delicious fairy-tale of Jane Austen-ish charm set in Napoleonic days, all redolent of lavender and old lace.

Describing it as "a perfectly sweet little play" S. R. Littlewood, one of the many critics who were captivated by it, wrote in the *Morning Leader*: "Its writing and its acting are no less delightful than its conception. It is written in playful but never extravagant burlesque of the old stilted style of converse. It is acted with pathos and grace too exquisite for words on the part of Miss Marion Terry as the elder sister. Mr. Seymour Hicks is sometimes quite overcome with excellent sincerity, and as for Miss Terriss, she has become an almost miraculous combination of prettiness and care."

The Star wrote of it as "a comedy of sentiment with laughter

rippling merrily over a bed of tears. When the laughter has faded there lingers the memory of a superbly true study of a woman's heart. That is Mr. Barrie's triumph. . . . More than once the sentiment threatens to degenerate into wallowing sentimentality; sometimes, too, mere verbiage obscures the action or exceeding obviousness mars the quality of the humour. But the defects are submerged by the virtues and the best of Mr. Barrie comes out victorious."

Alice Sit-by-the-Fire, produced at the Duke of York's Theatre in 1905 and written for Ellen Terry, was a misfire and is not to be accounted as one of Barrie's successes. It displayed originality and cleverness as a satire upon the plays of the period. Irene Vanbrugh appeared as a romantic-minded daughter who, having imbibed notions about family life from overmuch playgoing, figured her mother (Ellen Terry) as a participant in a melodramatic triangular situation. Miss Terry never felt at home in the part and the play rarely came to life.

Barrie's curious insight into feminine psychology was evident in *What Every Woman Knows* (1908), for here he showed with characteristic humour, satire and whimsicality, the subtle influence which women exercise upon the male creature.

To my mind no play of his shows firmer character-drawing and no scene of his construction so lingers in my memory as the opening when Wylie père and his bachelor sons discuss the problem of Maggie, the "charmless" girl whom that surprising student John Shand is presently persuaded by canny bargaining to take in marriage. That is when we first learnt the meaning of "char-r-m":

MAGGIE (*getting near the tragedy*): How can you say that when you don't know her? I expect she's full of charm.

ALICK: Charm? It's the very word he used.

DAVID: Havering idiot.

ALICK: What *is* charm, Maggie?

MAGGIE: Oh it's—it's a sort of bloom on a woman. If you have it you don't need to have anything else; and if you don't have it, it doesn't matter much what else you have. Some women, the few, have charm for all; and most have charm for one. But some have charm for none.

I can picture the whole scene now as the Wylie family (Henry Vibart, Sydney Valentine and Edmund Gwenn) sat round the parlour table; I can hear the very tones of Hilda Trevelyan as she pronounced that definition. The whole act (which introduced also

Gerald du Maurier as the burglarious railway porter-student) was a triumph of craftsmanship. It raised expectation to the highest degree and if, in the matter of technique, there is a better opening act in any modern dramatic literature, I should be glad to hear of it.

What *did* every woman know? It was characteristic of Barrie that he should keep his little joke to be summed up in a brief sentence or two at the very end of the play. That is where the wayward John Shand, M.P., having strayed into high society, expresses shamefaced contrition to his wife Maggie :

MAGGIE : Why did you shiver, John ?

JOHN : It was at myself for saying that I couldn't live with you again, when I should have been wondering how for so long you have lived with me. And I suppose you have forgiven me all the time. (*She nods.*) And forgive me still ? (*She nods again.*) Dear God !

MAGGIE : John, am I to go ? or are you to keep me on ? (*She is now a little bundle at his feet.*) I'm willing to stay because I'm useful to you, if it can't be for a better reason. (*His hand feels for her, and the bundle wriggles nearer.*) It's nothing unusual I've done, John. Every man who is high up loves to think he has done it all himself ; and the wife smiles, and lets it go at that. It's only our joke. Every woman knows that.

Little Mary, produced at the Duke of York's in 1903, also kept Barrie's little joke until the last. It was a poor joke indeed, and all that one cares to remember of one of his most inferior pieces—despite an excellent little cameo of acting by John Hare as the Earl of Carlton—is that it enriched the English language with a new euphemism that was to remain a popular catchword long after its run had ended.

It is rather odd that Barrie, who in all his plays showed such original genius, should depend for permanent recognition of his fame upon *Peter Pan*, a play for children written for Christmas production in 1904 and annually revived as a holiday entertainment ever since.

I must confess that, although among the most fervent admirers of Barrie, I have never been an enthusiast for this particular piece of whimsy, but that may be due, of course, to over-familiarity with its manifold delights of pirates, redskins, flying children, crocodiles and other such oddities of the Never Never Land. As far as the Barrie canon is concerned it is my blind spot. This particular exhibition of undeniable sentimentality has always made me feel a trifle abashed and uncomfortable, and in the company of children

I have felt positive embarrassment when the old, old appeal is made: "Do you believe in fairies?" I have frequently heard dissenting noises expressed, juvenile snorts indicative of scorn and contempt for the silliness of such a question. My own particular experience has been that its appeal to children is far less than most grown-ups imagine. Little girls may like it—and I think they should do—but the average youngster more appreciates the hearty knockabout humour of pantomime than all the arch whimsy of Barrie's piece. Yet the facts seem against me. Year after year its success is renewed and as much preliminary fuss is made about the casting of Peter as there is about the identity of the Prince in the next production of the Old Vic's Hamlet. Whether Pauline Chase, Zena Dare, Phyllis Calvert or Margaret Lockwood were half as good as Nina Boucicault is a question which has been discussed by critics of scholarly reputation. Such disputations have always left me amazed and incredulous. As well to dispute, as far as I am concerned, which Fairy Queen of pantomime has most fulfilled one's ideal conception of that classic role.

I can well understand, therefore, the doubts and misgivings of Charles Frohman when Barrie offered the play to him. He was against production, I believe, and after he had reluctantly accepted it he wanted to postpone it. Barrie, however, had great faith in his play and it was an immediate success when produced at the Duke of York's on December 27, 1904. Time has proved that Frohman was as wrong in his judgment of the play as I suppose I am.

Nina Boucicault was the original (and by common consent the best) Peter Pan; Hilda Trevelyan the ideal Wendy; Gerald du Maurier the Mr. Darling and Captain Hook and Dorothea Baird the Mrs. Darling. It ran for 145 performances.

Peter Pan captivated the grown-ups and even more so the most hardened critics. *The Stage* said of it: "Mr. Barrie has entered fully into the joys and delights of childhood days, and he has peopled his newest fantasy with the choicest personages from the pages of Marryat or Cooper, side by side with the heroes of our youth, who interpret incidents which only the most elastic imagination could conceive. The whole is impregnated by the nimble wit and facile fancy which the eminent dramatist has at command and the blend of humour and pretty sentiment constitutes a piece that no one, old or young, should resist."

The *Illustrated London News* said that it combined the child's passion for make-believe and the average little girl's maternal instinct,

and described it as "an artfully artless play which has all the pretty inconsequences of an imaginative child's improvisations".

Peter Pan underwent some alterations in its second year, when Cissie Loftus played Peter, and by that time critics were hailing it as an established classic. It is odd to remember, by the way, that in its first production Gerald du Maurier introduced a series of impersonations of popular actors!

Writing in 1908 J. T. Grein gave an excellent summing-up of Barrie's achievements when he wrote: "If anyone would endeavour to explain, let alone to imitate the humour of Barrie he would find himself nonplussed, for Barrie knows how to blend the ideal, the romantic and the realistic in a manner which is indescribable yet appealing to all sorts and conditions of men. He is, *par excellence*, the narrator of fairy-tales for grown-up folks."

* * *

When I come upon some of the other later Edwardian playwrights who were not at all affected by the current move towards the intellectual drama and very little concerned with grim and weighty social problems, I find myself in a very mixed assembly.

High among them must be placed Somerset Maugham who was thirty when his first play, *A Man of Honour*,¹ was produced, originally by the Stage Society and then at the Avenue Theatre in 1904 when the author had modified its cynical ending. It was the story of the misalliance between a barmaid and a barrister with the resultant incompatibilities, quarrels and domestic upsets, ending in the unhappy wife's suicide. It was treated with sincerity and relentless realism and it created the belief that the author was a cynic and a pessimist. Thereupon Maugham changed his note and in *Lady Frederick*, at the Court Theatre in 1907, produced a light and witty comedy. Its success was such that his plays became in great demand so that in the following year he broke all records as a playwright by having four plays running simultaneously in the West End: *Lady Frederick*, *Mrs. Dot* (at the Court), *Jack Straw* (Vaudeville) and *The Explorer* (Lyric). His reputation was firmly established as a writer of light comedy of extreme polish and of mordant wit. They reflected with an astringent touch of cynicism the modes and manners of the fashionable world. Written with an exquisite grace of dialogue they bore the same relation to the times as did the comedies of Farquhar and Congreve and (if without their

¹ Unless one counts *Schiffbruchig* produced in German in Berlin, 1901.

lyrical charm) with a technique and craftsmanship of infinite superiority.

Maugham's subsequent comedies included *Penelope* (Comedy, 1909), *The Noble Spaniard* which was adapted from the French (Royalty, 1909), *Smith* (Comedy, 1909), and *Grace* (Duke of York's, 1910). He was too copious, too facile in turning out these successes to please some critics.

Regarding these later plays E. A. Baughan wrote, "Success seems to have entered his blood and he can no longer be as sincere as he was in *A Man of Honour*," while J. T. Grein said of him: "W. Somerset Maugham remains the spoilt child of the dramatic Muse. His *Penelope*, with a magnificent scene for Miss Marie Tempest in the second act, introduced Parisian *esprit* into an English mould; his *Noble Spaniard* was a little incursion into adaptation which had charm because the first act gave a faithful picture in the early Victorian days. His *Smith* is, in many ways, the best of his plays. . . . It cannot be gainsaid that in dialogue and construction it reveals the infinite resource and the uncommon power of observation of this successful author."

Success, as Baughan had observed, had indeed entered his blood and it was to find further expression in succeeding years in plays of greater depth and increased brilliance.

I cannot imagine playwrights of more complete contrast than Somerset Maugham and Hall Caine who, having dramatised *The Christian*, in 1899, turned to the stage again in 1902. It was Oscar Wilde, I think, who remarked that this once enormously popular novelist "wrote at the top of his voice". He was certainly vociferous in expressing the extravagance of his imagination in dramatic form.

The Eternal City, which Tree produced at His Majesty's Theatre in 1902, was a piece of lurid romanticism carved out of the then widely read novel, and Tree lavished upon it magnificent settings, panoramas of Rome, Papal ceremonials, all displayed to the accompaniment of Mascagni's music. No extravagance was omitted, least of all in Hall Caine's wildly unrealistic imagination. There was one scene in which the Italian Premier Bonelli invaded the Vatican and proceeded to browbeat the Pope! Tree gave a bizarre display as the amorous Bonelli but even as crude melodrama the play was a failure; it produced, as one critic remarked, "only a feeling of amused exasperation".

Hall Caine, however, did better in 1905 when *The Prodigal Son*

was produced at Drury Lane. It marked a praiseworthy attempt by its director, Arthur Collins, to get out of the rut—to raise the quality of the customary autumn melodrama, and perhaps in literary style it was an improvement. But its situations had little more probability than usual and its characters were just as unreal as those previously seen on the boards of old Drury. "Mr. Caine", said the *Illustrated London News*, "is one of those sensationalists who must go from climax to climax of emotion and it must strike twelve at every hour." Well, Arthur Collins gave him every help on this occasion. Realistic scenes moved from Iceland to Monte Carlo and the author's remarkable heroics were expressed as well as might be by George Alexander (who had temporarily deserted the St. James's), by Frank Cooper (always a superb hero), Mrs. John Wood and Mary Rorke.

In the following year came *The Bondman* which had a similar theme in the love of two men for one woman, though this time the action passed from the author's Manxland to Sicily. This was excellent for the wide open spaces of the Drury Lane stage. In one scene it was crowded with a herd of live and well-behaved cattle; in another there was an awesome representation of a sulphur mine which, as one critic noted, was much more lifelike than any of the characters.

J. T. Grein thought the play, with all its improbabilities, "an estimable expression of its class; a step towards progress". "It indicates", he said, "that if Mr. Hall Caine would bridle the extravagance of his imagination and devote himself to serious drama, he might achieve a play of lasting value."

Unfortunately for his dramatic ambitions Hall Caine never did so.

The play was a great success though it evoked some of the most delightful exercises in criticism that I have ever read concerning one particular play.

Anthony Ellis, in *The Star*, wrote that the author "has complicated his theme, confused the issues, obscured motives, indulged in irrelevances and made it at all times difficult to understand his *dramatis personae*. Still," he added, "there are passages of quite unusual vigour, incidents crowded with swift, pulsating action; Mr. Hall Caine, using the gifts he has, appeals to 'the heart of the people'. The people answer him with jovial laughter, tense silences and deep-throated applause. And by 'the people' I make no sneering suggestion of humble folk alone. I saw many smart women crying in the stalls."

In *The Tribune*, William Archer described Hall Caine as "a belated romantic of the school of 1830, a spiritual descendant—but oh! how many times removed!—of Victor Hugo. I am bound to record that there is a vigour, a sort of slap-dash grandiosity with which he imposes himself upon the public to whom he appeals."

As to Arthur Collins's production he said: "I should not have rebelled against a little more bucolic realism in the farmyard. It seemed to me that the parts allotted to the famous cows might have been written up a little more, even if the dialogue allotted to the bipeds had been correspondingly cut down."

Frank Harris boasted, in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, that he had yawned over the play because "there was no characterisation of any sort; the dialogue, in flat commonness, they read like a parody of earnest speech. The situations were of the scene-painter and had nothing to do with the constructive talent of a playwright."

The Stage was not impressed with the author's gifts as a playwright. "There certainly is much careful writing in it", it said, "but he deals with such a mass of detail that he seems for ever to be explaining."

In his brilliantly amusing notice in *The Times* A. B. Walkley was most unkind to Mr. Caine. "We have seen all his plays", he said, "in the ordinary course of our business; and they only serve to bring home to us more forcibly than ever the distinction between business and pleasure. They seem to us of poor intellectual texture, crude in method, garish and as noisy as a brass band. They present a set of people, violent, barbarous, whom we do not know and do not want to know and cannot persuade ourselves to believe in."

The acting was generally praised, particularly that of Frank Cooper and Henry Ainley, but it was agreed that Mrs. Patrick Campbell was woefully miscast as the Manx girl Greeba. She was there, of course, because of her star value. Whatever the critics had to say the production attracted the Drury Lane public. When the play was revived in the following year (1907) at the Adelphi there was an ideal Greeba in Wynne Matthison.

During the decade about which I am writing a considerable number of new playwrights appeared with works of much promise, only to disappoint theatre-goers by their subsequent unproductivity.

In 1902 Justin Huntley McCarthy supplied George Alexander with *If I Were King*, a capital example of the cloak-and-sword drama, taking much liberty with history in a fantastic story marked

with humour and sentiment. Great hopes were raised when, in 1907, Lena Ashwell produced Anthony Wharton's *Irene Wycherley* at the Kingsway. It was his first play and it displayed a notable grasp of stage technique, a capacity for writing dialogue and boldness and sincerity in tackling a sex problem. Yet little more was heard of the author after that. Lena Ashwell also produced, in 1908, Cicely Hamilton's *Diana of Dobson's*, handling an interesting theme about a shop-girl with a combination of comedy and drama. It was her only really important contribution to the stage although she wrote many other plays.

Claude Askew and Edward Knoblock caused a considerable stir with *The Shulamite*, at the Savoy in 1906. Despite its melodramatic treatment this story of Boer farm life was a powerfully written and moving piece and, but for its uncertain construction, it might have attained the level of real tragedy. The partnership produced nothing further, though Knoblock was to show his skill in construction later on in other collaborations, notably with Arnold Bennett whose own newspaper play, *What the Public Wants*, an ironic skit on the methods of the "yellow press", was a success in 1909.

It was in that year that Rudolf Besier's *Don* was produced at the Haymarket. It was a deeply interesting and sensitively written comedy about a modern Quixote, illustrating—while never attaining too serious a level—how idealistic people are apt to come into grievous conflict with the conventions of the world. It was the best play of his career, though later he had some successes in collaboration with other writers. Earlier in the year he had written *Olive Latimer's Husband*, and in 1906 had his verse play, *The Virgin Goddess*, produced at the Adelphi during the brief vogue of the poetic drama.

XV

THE POETIC DRAMA

HOW DOES ONE ACCOUNT FOR THAT SUDDEN BUT SHORT-LIVED passion for plays in verse? Was it that the theatrical conscience was stirred into the belief that it should do something noble and altruistic in raising the standard of culture on the stage? I fear not. It was moved by the desire, I fancy, to cash in on the extraordinary success of the young ex-actor poet, Stephen Phillips, whose poems were selling in large editions—yes, in thousands of copies—when the century began. Such praise as he had received was enough to turn the head of any writer, however strong of fibre—and, alas! Phillips was an easygoing, weak and irresolute creature. Success was not good for him. It led to his rapid decline and eventual ruin.

It is difficult now to realise the extent of the vogue that once was his. When *Paolo and Francesca* was published in 1900 he was the most praised poet in England, recalling, as the *Westminster Gazette* said, the early triumphs of Swinburne and Tennyson. At the age of thirty-one he was the literary sensation of his time. Tree staged *Herod*, at His Majesty's, with his customary extravagance, and though it was not a considerable success it increased the young poet's fame. Then in February 1902 came *Ulysses*, another occasion for spectacular magnificence. Based on the epic romance of the *Odyssey* it was an imposing transcription of Homer in which the pictorial element swamped the poetry. Tree, of course, was a picturesque Ulysses, Nancy Price a beautiful and affecting Calypso and Constance Collier dazzling, goddess-like and imposing as Athene.

A month later came *Paolo and Francesca*, at the St. James's Theatre, and then the critical praise really was unleashed. The poet, whose *Herod* had been favourably compared with the works of Webster and Chapman, was hailed as the successor to Sophocles and Shakespeare. "Mr. Phillips", cried James Douglas in the *Morning Leader*, "is the greatest poet we have had since Elizabethan times." "Mr. Phillips has achieved the impossible. Sardou could not have ordered the action more skilfully, Tennyson could not

have clothed the passion in words of purer loveliness," proclaimed William Archer.

The lyrical beauty of Phillips's poetry was praised, but some critics charged him with primitive stage-craft and with having borrowed (consciously or unconsciously) from *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Pelleas and Melisande*.

Nero, at His Majesty's in 1906, provided Tree with the opportunity for more magnificence and with a splendidly showy part for himself. "Spectacle may be said to have reached the limit of its resources and realism to have spoken its final word in the pictures illustrating the luxury and decadence of ancient Rome," said the *Illustrated London News*.

As a play it was a series of sketches rather than a strongly knit tragedy but there was some passionate lyrical writing in its scattered scenes as, for instance, in *Nero's* soliloquy while enjoying the spectacle of burning Rome :

This fire is not the act of mortal mind
But is the huge conception of a spirit
Dreaming beyond the tomb a mighty thought.
She would express herself in burning fire.
This is the awful vengeance of the dead.
This is my mother Agrippina's deed.
I will not baulk the fury of her spirit.
No ! Let her glut her anger on the city,
For only Rome in ashes can appease her.
Let the fire rage and purge me of her blood !

Then as the flames rose upwards :

How beautiful !
Like a rose magnificently burning !
Rage on !
Thou art that which poets use
Or which consume them.
Thou art in me !
Thou dreadful womb of mighty spirits
And crimson sepulchre of them !

Or, again, Herod's soliloquy after his acclamation as an emperor when the realisation of power dawns upon him :

O all the earth to-night into these hands
Committed ! I bow down beneath the load,
Empurpled in a lone omnipotence !
My softest whisper thunders in the sky :

And in my frown the temples sway and reel,
 And the utmost isles are anguished. I but raise
 An eyelid and a continent shall cower,
 My finger makes the city a solitude—
 The murmuring metropolis a silence
 And kingdoms pine in my dispeopling nod.

O wine of the world, the odour and gold of it :
 There is no thirst which I may not assuage—
 There is no hunger which I may not sate.
 Naught is forbidden to me under heaven !

(*with a cry*)

I shall go mad ! I shall go mad !

Faust, at His Majesty's in 1908, was a new version of the old legend by Phillips and J. Comyns Carr. As a spectacle it was a scenic wonder. In its weird Brocken scenes and its visions of Helen and Cleopatra it outdid anything Irving ever produced in the way of elaborate effects. Steam was laid on from the neighbouring hotel to provide the right mystic atmosphere. Tree looked vastly impressive in representing Mephistopheles as a kind of super-showman ; Henry Ainley was handsome and debonair as Faust, and Marie Löhr was a tender and youthful Marguerite. But the poetical beauty was not there—or, at least, it was swamped by such scenic elaboration.

Paolo and Francesca was Phillips's greatest success ; his other plays never drew the public to any extent. At the height of his fame he was drawing as much as £500 a week. With his unstable character the money soon vanished and after his few years of success he was soon forgotten. He died in poverty in 1915.

He was a poet of fine soaring imagination, combining fancy, power and passion with charm and felicity of expression. Had he been a better stage craftsman and a man of more stable temperament he might have written great tragedy. His one real tragedy was his own life. His prime failing was that he could not write round a plot. His plays were fragmentary successions of melodramatic scenes, with here and there, splendid flashes of imagination.

It was hoped that his work would lead to a revival of the poetic drama and, to an extent, it did. But the vogue was brief.

Among those who very worthily contributed to it were manager Otho Stuart and actor Oscar Asche, two old Bensonians who optimistically hoped to turn the Adelphi Theatre, hitherto a

recognised home of melodrama, into a temple of verse drama. They aimed at attracting the average playgoer—but the average playgoer, alas! was not to be wooed.

This gallant endeavour began with J. B. Fagan's *The Prayer of the Sword* and after the production of *Hamlet*, with H. B. Irving, and *The Taming of the Shrew*, with Lily Brayton as Katharina, there came Rudolf Besier's *The Virgin Goddess*. It was the work of a young poet of fine and cultivated mind who, in a programme note, pointed out that it was written for performance on the modern stage and was intended to be judged as an acting play, not as a literary *tour de force*.

It has some impressive passages of power and passion, and it was acted with dignity by Oscar Asche, Lily Brayton, Alfred Brydone and Genevieve Ward. In theme and expression the play was lofty but it was stiff and formal in action and movement, following as it did the conventions of the Greek tragedy, with its Chorus chanting dirges at frequent intervals, its dismal forecastings of woe and death, its murdered kings and such darkly tragic events.

"A man suddenly entering the theatre during the progress of the play and as suddenly leaving it might imagine that it was the real thing," wrote one rather bored and disapproving critic. "But if he sat down for ten minutes he would discover that *The Virgin Goddess* lacked the true grip of tragedy. . . . We hope that Mr. Besier will write many more plays. And we feel sure they will not be Greek tragedies."

On the other hand the play was highly praised by the more serious critics for its fine tragic sweep and poetic treatment. "Its verse had the right dramatic qualities of swiftiness, vividness and suppleness," wrote Anthony L. Ellis in *The Star*. "Its note was stately and dignified. If it was never sublime it was never ridiculous but preserved a fine means of rhetorical vigour, allied with dramatic action. . . . Welcome to a new force in the drama of to-day."

What Ellis had to say in praise of its dramatic qualities may be illustrated by quotation. It is Hephæstion's speech after he has slain his brother, Cresphontes, King of Artis :

"And you that see my brother slain,
And these my hands all crimson with his life,
Judge also. Mother, when the tidings reached me
That over Artis, like twin thunderclouds,
Ruin, and worse than ruin, dishonour, gloomed,
I swore to compass her relief or die,

And keep her name untarnished evermore.
 I came, and ere I met the King, discerned
 No menace of dishonour, for all our men
 Clamoured for instant battle and the embrace
 Of furious death, and in my heart I said,
 'Sunlike at least we'll pass into the night,
 Magnificent in dreadful pomp of blood!'
 But he that now lies silent at thy feet,
 Mother, e'en he that drew upon our walls
 Peril, and made our name a scorn in Greece,
 He would have quenched with set, intolerant will,
 This fiery lust for splendid death, and fain
 Had dashed the cup of glory from our lips,
 Betraying the city to immortal shame,
 And with immortal shame smirching the sword
 That dazzled once the eyes of all the world.
 Therefore I slew him."

And here is a passage from the speech of the Virgin, priestess of Artemis :

"I prayed within.
 When suddenly upon my soul there swept
 Unearthly music from the hills of dream
 And alien darkness from beyond the world
 Then a white star rose singing in the gloom
 Grew large, and like a vast and luminous rose,
 Unfolding delicate petals one by one,
 Disclosed a heart intolerably bright,
 And from that brightness, like an odour, breathed
 The voice of Artemis, and spake :

' Hephæstion,
 Whose life was dedicate to none save me,
 Lured by the fair flesh of his brother's wife,
 Hath scorned his vow and slain his brother and sought
 To veil his wickedness in patriot love.
 Therefore shall Artis sink into the dust,
 And all her people to the dead go down,
 Unless Hephæstion take his father's sword
 And slay Althea as sacrifice to me
 Ere the sun disappears into the wave.
 Nor shall he leave this precinct where he stands
 And join the battle ere this deed be done.
 I have spoken.'

And the luminous blossom closed
 Its petals, dwindled to a star, and sank,
 And the great darkness lifted from my soul."

But the lyrical quality of Besier's verse was what has most impressed me. The poet's gift cannot be denied to one who could write such lines as those for the chorus of youths :

Long since a shepherd on the lonely hills
 Of Arcady beheld in waking dream
 Parting with silver feet the daffodils
 That fringed his highland stream,
 And followed by her nymphs in fluttering race
 And with wild night upon her face,
 Immortal beauty out of moonlight wrought,
 Artemis armed and saddled for the chase.

A play of gloom and austere beauty did not draw and Rudolf Besier, having demonstrated such genuine gifts and such promise, turned no more to poetic drama.

In the same year Laurence Binyon's *Attila*, a blank verse tragedy, was seen at His Majesty's Theatre. Again it was Oscar Asche and Lily Brayton who devoted themselves so courageously to the cause. Binyon's verse was majestic in rhythm and felicitous in poetic phrase and imagery but there was little interest in the theme which was sustained by only two characters.

Tristram and Iseult by J. Comyns Carr was produced at the Adelphi in 1906. Carr drew upon Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* and Wagner's opera for his version of the great love legend but, though he was quite an able craftsman, it required more than an amiable talent in versifying to lift such a play into the realm of great poetry. It was moving melodrama but the poetic fire and fervour were missing in his theme, despite the notable acting of Oscar Asche, Lily Brayton and Matheson Lang who was then hailed as a young actor of classic quality.

Most enthusiastic praise came from J. T. Grein who, in the *Sunday Times* declared, "It will have a refining influence on the masses", and described it as "something to kindle the imagination, to occupy the intellect, to flatter our sense of the beautiful".

One thinks that Mr. Grein was a little over-excited and indiscriminating on that occasion, for there was nothing in the play that added to Malory or Wagner, nothing of Stephen Phillips's poetic impulse and passionate expression to adorn the theme. E. A. Baughan in the *Daily News* took a very moderate view. "I have read and re-read Mr. Comyns Carr's poem," he wrote, "and in spite of a few felicitous lines I cannot but think that the author might have realised his drama with more poignancy had he



GERTIE MILLAR in *The Girls of Gottenberg*, Gaiety Theatre, 1907.



MARIE STUDHOLME in *The Orchid*, Gaiety Theatre, 1903.



Scene in *The Orchid*, Gaiety Theatre, 1903.



GERTIE MILLAR and EDMUND PAYNE in *The Spring Chicken*, Gaiety Theatre, 1905.

expressed himself in prose. . . . Mr. Carr's verse in the most strenuous situations never arises above the pretty in literature."

With that view I concur, and I quote a passage which, I think, represents the height of the author's inspiration—the scene in which Tristram and Iseult have drunk the poison and are awaiting death. They hear the chorus of sailors announcing the approach of the ship to land :

- TRISTRAM : They sing of day !
 ISEULT : Yes, 'tis the night that comes !
 TRISTRAM : Yes, truly, so it is. Then hasten night.
 Under this golden prison men call day !
 ISEULT : Nay, look again, it hath the grace of dawn ;
 The stars are flushed with crimson and the sky
 Holds some new light I know not.
 TRISTRAM : Through the dusk
 The way shines clearly that shall lead us on.
 And who are they that wander hand in hand
 Within that shadowy wood ? They come in troops
 With cheeks still wet with weeping !
 Who are they ?
 ISEULT : I see them not ! Thou hast gone on before
 Where I must follow thee. Ah, now see !
 They also trod the way that waits for us !
 Wilt thou too take this hand ? All's over now.
 It cannot harm thee more !
 TRISTRAM : It healed me once !
 ISEULT : And wounded thee again. Aye, past all cure !
 TRISTRAM : The cure is here at last. Look where the sea
 Breaks into flower and all the whitened foam
 Is strewn with blossom ! Spring is here again.
 ISEULT : Can this be Death's rough road ?
 TRISTRAM : An' if it be
 Then Death and Life are one, and Death and Love.
 For, look you, Love stands there, with rose-crowned brow.
 He passes 'midst those shadowy forms whose eyes
 Are lifted up to greet him as he goes !

All very pretty and commonplace, also without an image of beauty or a touch of the poet's imagination save in the phrase about the sea breaking into flower. And so, rarely was there to be found a trace of fire and of true poetic inspiration in the whole of Mr. Carr's play.

Tristram and Iseult did not attract, and so came to an end a brave attempt to give the public what it so evidently did not want.

Being somewhat of a heretic in the matter of the poetic drama I am inclined to agree with what that brilliant journalist A. M. Thompson (himself a very respectable rhymester) wrote in *The Clarion* after the production of Comyns Carr's play : " The dramatist who swathes himself in verse for the traffic of the modern stage is as a runner that should apparel his legs for a race in a sack. He hampers and hinders himself, yet gains nothing, for even if his verse had all the music and flexibility of Shakespeare's, the modern actors—unused to depend on merely vocal aids—would so trip and stumble over it as to tear its music and sheen to shreds, retaining only its drag to speedy action."

He tackled the enthusiasts who desired that the poetic drama should be received " with all encouragement ". " In the name of wonder, why ? " he asked. " Because it is written, forsooth, in b——k verse. Because the author has chosen a vehicle for his meaning that is cumbrous and unsuitable. Because, instead of telling his tale in poetic prose, he has chosen to tell it in prosy poetry. Surely, this is no merit to be encouraged but a defect that he should be persuaded to amend. It is a fault that militates against the success of his play."

XVI

THE VEDRENNE-BARKER VENTURE

AS ONE LOOKS BACK UPON THE EXTENT AND VARIETY OF entertainment offered to the theatre-goer in the early days of the century the prospect appears fair enough. Every taste would seem to have been catered for and to an ample extent. The theatre could boast of such active popular playwrights as Pinero, Jones, Sutro, Carton, Barrie ; many others of promise were coming along ; there was Shaw to infuse into it an intellectual element, Stephen Phillips to introduce imagination and poetry ; frequent homage was done to Shakespeare and the lighter stage provided no end of musical comedy.

Such leading actor-managers as Beerbohm Tree, George Alexander, Arthur Bouchier, Cyril Maude, Oscar Asche and Lewis Waller were at the height of their powers, all providing the kind of play that suited the wide tastes of the general public. Problem plays, witty comedies of high life with casts of characters liberally composed of titled and well-dressed folk exchanging epigrams in elegant drawing-rooms ; amusing farces ; handsome displays of gallantry and heroics, of frills and furbelows in romantic cloak-and-sword histrionics ; melodrama performed in near-realistic settings ; musical comedies composed of ingenious nonsense replete with gay tunes, abounding comedians and heaps of lovely ladies ; spectacular pieces of scenic splendour—everything, it seemed, was there to satisfy the popular taste and to make the after-dinner leisure of the public pass in the most agreeable way.

But it must not be imagined that the attitude of the public was wholly one of complacent acceptance of this state of affairs. There was an under-current of feeling that all was not well with the British stage, that it was not intellectually as good as it should be, that it had not kept pace with the progress of thought shown in the continental theatre ever since the influence of Ibsen had begun to make itself felt. There were those who thought the organisation of the theatre—or rather the lack of anything of the kind—was all wrong. The actor-manager system and long runs were held to be detrimental. In fact the small minority of intellectuals held that the drama was going to the dogs.

This dissatisfaction was expressed in many ways by professional critics and others connected with the theatre, as well as by those whose association with the theatre seemed very remote. There was always someone at hand to declare that the British drama was of little serious worth.

The Stage, in 1906, had a strong leader about this sad state of affairs, though it dealt with the organisation of the theatre rather than with the quality of what it purveyed.

"The regular stage within itself is crippled by its intractable methods," it said. "It has sacrificed itself to the long run and the long tour, and it is paying the penalty to-day in its lack of plays and its impoverished acting powers. Long runs have kept new writers out of the field. Long tours may not have had the same effect on would-be actors but have done a thing only less worse—that is recruited the stage with little or no discrimination. What are the consequences? The London stage is depressed and uncertain because it has no supply of attractive plays and also because it has ceased to place the old blind faith in the long run. For the big plays, the decisive successes, the long run is necessary. But only, it seems, for them. For the remainder of its work the London stage must look to methods less costly and hazardous. Then if the town stage is depressed and does not know its own mind what of the country? Matters could not be worse in the provinces. . . . Under the spell of the long run the piece put up for a few nights or a few weeks has seemed to playgoers negligible. . . . There must be simpler means, with greater attention to sound acting and altogether less reliance on meretricious adornment. It is the only way in which the stage can recover its productiveness and vigour."

As to what *The Stage* rather wildly described as "meretricious adornment"—meaning, I suppose such elaborate decoration as Tree gave to his Shakesporean revivals and his magnificent settings for such plays as *Nero*, *Ulysses*, *Herod*, etc.—there had been some striving towards a greater simplification in which Ellen Terry's son, Gordon Craig, had tried to lead the way. Craig had been trained as an actor in Irving's company and it was probably a reaction against the elaborate, photographically naturalistic settings of his chief's productions, that caused him to revolt against costly realism. But, in any case, he was a born rebel in artistic matters. He was drawn from acting to stage design and by 1900 had so developed his ideas that he exhibited his designs publicly in London and on the Continent where they caused much discussion. It was his aim to found a

theatre school in England but the necessary funds were not forthcoming. He was responsible for a few tentative productions in London but he met with scant encouragement so, somewhat in a huff—he was always rather inclined to behave like a spoilt child crying for the moon—he betook himself to Berlin and Moscow and later he founded a theatre school in Florence.

Craig, with his bleak and austere settings greatly enhanced by elaborate lighting effects, was somewhat in advance of his day and being something of a stage autocrat was undoubtedly a difficult artiste to cope with. As Glenn Hughes wrote in *The Story of the Theatre*, "He insisted that the theatre should be noble, not tawdry, that it should be the home of the artiste, that it should be ruled by the artiste and that the artiste should be creative, not imitative, that the production should be harmonious. It should be realistic or conventionalised, but not both things. . . . Mr. Craig's fundamental motive was to rid the stage of the elaborate clap-trap of nineteenth-century scenery and to put in its place a combination of decorative curtains and simple architectural units which could be handled swiftly and easily, thereby restoring to Shakespeare's plays their natural tempo and proper sequence of scenes."

Though he met with very little support in these revolutionary ideas and obtained much more encouragement on the Continent, Craig did have an undoubted influence upon the manner of stage production in later years, for Granville-Barker's Shakesperean presentations owed a great deal to his methods. The settings were a compromise between Craig's ideas and the Elizabethan manner. They evoked considerable discussion and some caustic comment but they were sufficiently successful and impressive to encourage a number of imitators.

In an article on "Our Insolvent Theatre", in the *National Review* during 1906, Austin Harrison described the current fare in the theatre in such terms as "an inordinate number of farcical impressions with song and dance", "a series of English adaptations of French and German plays", "here and there a successful English play and the spectacle of pomp and pageantry". Such wild and whirling words showed a remarkable disregard or ignorance of fact and an enormous amount of prejudice and exaggeration. It is true that there were occasional adaptations or translations from the French to be seen but they formed a very small proportion among the mass of plays annually staged. Mr. Harrison's reproach must have been based, with hazy misinterpretation, upon the fact that,

during the period in which he wrote, French and German companies were frequently performing in London, presenting many of the latest plays of their respective countries before the British public. This was eminently to our advantage and was of immense value in giving the stage a wider outlook.

But Mr. Harrison did greater injustice to the theatre of his time when he denounced "the hero worship of the male" which, he said, "relegated actresses to an inferior position and left their talent undeveloped". "No author", he asserted, "now writes a play in England to show off a woman. . . . A lop-sided one-sex theatre must inevitably be somewhat adequate."

This was most arrant stuff-and-nonsense, for the truth was absolutely to the contrary. There was hardly ever a time in which actresses had so great a prominence. Many authors wrote particularly for them. This was particularly so in the case of Pinero who invariably wrote his most showy parts for women and made them the chief focus of attention in most of his plays. Apart from his earlier plays did not *Letty*, *Iris*, *His House in Order*, give the most arresting parts to the actress? Was Irene Vanbrugh ever over-shadowed? What of Barrie's *Alice Sit-by-the-Fire*, Shaw's *Candida*, *Major Barbara*, *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* and *Man and Superman* in which Anne Whitefield was the real centre of interest? What of the plays of Sutro and R. C. Carton and of the many comedies in which Marie Tempest so sparkled as completely to outshine the mere actor?

But, of course, any stick was good enough to beat a dog with. There was always a lively article to be composed on the theme of "What's wrong with the British Theatre?" and it never much mattered how the truth might be distorted to fit the writer's argument.

Take, for instance, an expression of the Socialist point of view. I quote from an article written by A. M. Thompson in *The Clarion*. He was a most amiable fellow and a very successful writer of musical comedies. He was responsible for the "books" of *The Arcadians* and *The Dairymaids* which, though superior in their class, did nothing more than titillate the appetites of those who merely sought entertainment in the theatre. But that did not prevent him from scarifying the existing theatre in such terms as these:

"The stage is still as feudal as the wig of the Lord Mayor's coachman. It is true that the players no longer call themselves 'the servants of the King or Earl' but in effect they are as much

as ever the retainers of King and nobles, ministers to princely and aristocratic pleasures and dependent upon princely or aristocratic favour. Theatrical conditions, due to the ambitious prodigality of actor-managers and the reckless competition of adventurous syndicates, make it impossible for any play to live at the West End of London (whence comes the country's whole supply of plays) unless it attract nightly for many months large numbers of the people of 'quality' who can afford to pay half a guinea for a seat. The test of a play's merit is therefore in its power to titillate the epicurean sluggishness of Park Lane and Belgravia. The actor, the author, the British Drama itself, hang upon the patronage of Property. The play is a Society toy, the player a mere Society puppet. . . . Stalls and boxes come to the theatre, not to be worried but amused, not to digest thought but their dinners."

There were critics from without, too. In 1904 the French writer, Augustin Filon, who eight years earlier had called attention to the existence of a modern English drama, changed his note from one of approval, declaring that his hopes had been disappointed and that after a little spurt of progress the British drama had relapsed into a worse condition than before—in short, that the British drama was dying.

He was wrong, for while some of those earlier dramatists of whom he had previously written in such approval had declined in quality or had dropped out of the running altogether, Pinero was still pursuing his successful way and such others as Barrie, Stephen Phillips and, above all, Bernard Shaw, had come to the front. The stage of 1904 was altogether more vital and interesting than it had been ten years previously. Considering the growing eminence of Shaw, Filon had chosen a curious time in which to announce the impending dissolution of the British drama.

In 1906 Mario Borsa, an Italian journalist of considerable perceptiveness who had long made a study of our national institutions and characteristics, published an English translation of his book *Il Teatro Inglese Contemporaneo*, the main theme of which was that we had no theatre—that is in the sense of a national institution comparable with the Théâtre Français of Paris, the Burg Theater of Vienna or the Royal Theatre of Copenhagen. This, of course, was as true then as it is of our present condition. But Signor Borsa made this the text for an argument about our general theatrical shortcomings. Among other things he laid blame upon the actor-manager system, the long runs, the frivolity and stupidity of the

general public. In his assessment of British playwrights he placed Sutro above Henry Arthur Jones, proclaimed Pinero to be "our sole, unique and true dramatist" and was severely critical of Bernard Shaw. "Cerebrally", he said, "Shaw is a phenomenon to be exhibited at fairs" and he added that his "vertiginous dynamic ability strongly contrasted with the static quality of the Anglo-Saxon brain would have been enviable and precious to the critic, the journalist, the sociologist, but has proved fatal to the artist". In short, as William Archer observed in an acute analysis of his statement, Shaw was evidently a bad playwright who wrote good plays.

A considerable stir was caused in 1906 when Henry Arthur Jones visited America for the production of his play *The Hypocrites*. He took the opportunity to deliver a lecture at Harvard University on "The corner stones of the modern drama".

It was a very long and somewhat intemperate pice of rhetoric containing some truths and a good deal of interesting historic references but what it resolved itself into was a lament on the sad state of the British drama. Nothing, it seemed, was right at home. He attributed the lagging behind of the drama to "the insane rage of Puritanism that would see nothing in the theatre but a horrible unholy thing to be crushed and stamped out of existence", adding, "The feeling of horror and fright of the theatre, engendered at the Restoration is even to-day widely prevalent and operative among religious classes in England and America. It muddles and stupefies our drama, and degrades it from a fine art to the rank of a somewhat disreputable form of entertainment."

Here was that marked prejudice which Mr. Jones had so often shown in his plays when depicting the Nonconformist character. It is difficult to see how he could have sustained this charge against the Puritans. In any case he made no reference to the fact that at this time such notable "Puritans" or Nonconformists as W. T. Stead and the Rev. R. J. Campbell had shown an active interest in the theatre.

"The secondary and resultant causes of the degradation of the drama" he said, were :

"The divorce of the English drama from English literature and the resultant contempt of English men of letters and literary critics for the theatre and the reaction of this contempt upon the drama itself ;

"The general absence from the English theatre and from modern English plays of any sane, consistent or intelligible ideas about morality. The inanities and indecencies of musical comedy are sniggered at and

applauded; the deepest permanent passions of men and women are tabooed;

"The divorce of the English drama from its sister arts; its deposition from any assured place in the intellectual and artistic life of the nation;

"The absorption of the English drama into popular amusement; the absence of any high standard whereby to judge acting or plays; the absence of all great traditions; the absence of all pride in the drama as a fine humane art;

"The want of a training school for actors—the want of any means of giving promising novices a consistent practice in varied roles."

"Of living, serious, operative modern drama we have scarcely a fragment to-day," declared Mr. Jones and he made such other comments as these:

"The all-round performance of a strong emotional play in Paris is immeasurably above the all-round performance of a strong emotional play in London; while the exhibition of quite amateur performances in leading parts, such as is not rarely seen on the London stage, would be a thing disgraceful or impossible in any leading city of France, to say nothing of Paris.

"The French are a nation of cultivated playgoers, alert to seize the finest shades of the actor's meaning. In England the great mass of playgoers have lost all sense that the drama is the art of representing life, and go to the theatre mainly to be awed by scenery, or to be tickled by funny antics and songs and dances that have no relation to life, and merely provide a means of wasting the evening in entertainment not far removed from idiocy."

I am glad to say that a number of writers sprang to the defence of the British drama and took Mr. Jones to task for many of his far too sweeping statements. What, for instance, was Mr. Jones doing to remedy the lamentable state of affairs which he had so eloquently described?

"Let Mr. Jones and his fellow pessimists write plays for the humble millions, plays that will not speak in false accents of melodrama but in the clear speech of truth to life which all can follow," said Anthony L. Ellis in *The Star*. "Let them do this and help the people forward to that educational height when the drama becomes a vital factor in their lives, a constant and refining influence. . . . Let Mr. Jones be up and doing, writing these works which shall enforce recognition as dramatic literature which shall form an integral part of our national culture. . . . Lectures will not win the day."

I remember nothing which indicates that Mr. Jones ever responded to this challenge.

"I must join issue with Mr. Henry Arthur Jones in his facile assumption that the drama is going to the dogs or has already been worried by them," wrote E. A. Baughan in the *Daily News*. "Fortunately (or unfortunately) my playgoing experience extends for over twenty years and I can honestly say that the British drama, so far from declining in value, has shown a gradual improvement. Think of the days when Burnand, Henry J. Byron and Bronson Howard wrote farces and Robertson and Albery supplied sentimental comedy. The advance is clear enough."

It was not in a specific reply to Mr. Jones but in a review of the season of 1905-06 that William Archer happened to write this: "How could we possibly count that a lean year which gave us *His House in Order*, *The Voysey Inheritance*, *Major Barbara* and *Nero*? Those of us who, after seeing four such plays within a single twelve-month, go on talking despondently of the English drama, are simply babbling thoughtlessly an ancient formula, which has ceased to bear any sort of relation to modern fact. The plain truth is that the English drama of to-day compares not at all unfavourably in point of intellectual enjoyment, with that of France, or even of Germany. We are as yet—thanks largely to our persistence in treating the drama as a mere article of commerce—considerably behind those nations in point of fertility. They produce more plays of intellectual pretensions than we do. But we possess in Mr. Pinero and Mr. Bernard Shaw two of the ablest dramatists of Europe; and if Mr. Granville-Barker¹ fulfils but one half the promise of his first (mature) work it should go hard but he will make a name far beyond the comparatively narrow circle to which as yet his reputation is confined."

Similarly E. F. Spence, writing in the *Westminster Gazette*, found cause for satisfaction in the state of the current drama, which, he said, "shows some progress in the mass of drama and acting and the average play exhibits a little improvement in technique and a slight tendency towards greater truth".

He cited as the most striking features of the 1906 season (a) the quantity of Shakespeare produced, (b) the revival of comic opera and (c) the brilliance (slightly intermittent) of the Court Theatre.

The Court Theatre—the Vedrenne-Barker experiment—that is

¹ Then at the Court Theatre.

what Henry Arthur Jones had completely overlooked or had chosen to ignore, and it was the most ungenerous feature of his indictment of the state of the British drama.

To deal with the foundation of this famous régime, the most interesting, the most momentous event of the period (and possibly, not only in itself but in its consequences, the most important happening in the history of the modern British theatre), one must go back to the establishment of the Independent Theatre by that notable enthusiast J. T. Grein in 1891. It never had a very large following and its funds during the seven years of its existence were always very scanty. Its first production was Ibsen's *Ghosts* which drew down upon the head of the society's founder a mass of vituperation, the most virulent expression of which came from Clement Scott. In all it produced twenty-six new plays, among them Bernard Shaw's *Widowers' Houses*.

In 1899, two years after the Independent had ceased to exist came the Stage Society organised by a few enthusiasts (among them Henry Arthur Jones) for the production of plays of serious and artistic character which actor-managers and managers of the commercial theatre did not consider suitable or possible for presentation. Its aims were to encourage and promote dramatic art, to serve as an experimental theatre, and to form an organisation such as might eventually profit by every opportunity for the creation in London of a permanent repertory theatre which the society would control.

The latter object was never achieved but the society in its Sunday performances and its Monday matinees produced a great number of outstanding plays by such authors as Ibsen, Shaw, Maeterlinck, Hauptmann, Thomas Hardy, R. L. Stevenson, Professor Gilbert Murray, Somerset Maugham, St. John Hankin, Brieux, Sudermann and W. B. Yeats.

One effect of its work was to give a young actor the opportunity to show his ability, first as an author—for early in its existence it produced *The Marrying of Anne Leete*—and then as a producer. This was Harley Granville-Barker, then in his very early twenties, who had been an actor with Charles Hawtrey and Ben Greet and had appeared in a performance given by the Elizabethan Stage Society. Bursting with ideas and very much under the influence of Gordon Craig, disliking the star system as much as he did the long run, he approached J. E. Vedrenne, a very capable business-man of the theatre, suggesting a scheme for running a stock company at

some small theatre. Capital was lacking, however, and the scheme fell through.

In 1904 J. H. Leigh, then proprietor of the Court Theatre, which he had converted from a dingy and uncomfortable house into one of the prettiest in London, sought Granville-Barker's help in the production of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Granville-Barker saw his chance. The Court was small and convenient and was just the theatre in which to carry out his ideas. He agreed to help Leigh on condition that he would allow him to present six matinee performances of Shaw's *Candida*.

So in 1904 the partnership began, Vedrenne attending to the business side while Granville-Barker devoted himself to the artistic direction of the venture. From the first they adopted the principle of short runs, each limited to a fixed number of performances. They did not attempt to run the theatre on real repertory lines—that is to say to present each new production for a few performances, to replace it by another, to revert to them at regular intervals and so gradually to build up a repertory. Such a scheme, requiring a fairly large permanent company and an adequate store of scenery, was beyond their means.

What they did was the best that could be done in the circumstances. At first they relied largely upon matinee productions. This enabled them to obtain the services of actors to whom they could not have offered full-time engagements. Every new production was tried out at a matinee and the most successful were placed in the evening bill. They relied upon matinees for performances of revivals, running one production in the afternoon as well as another in the evening.

Vedrenne and Granville-Barker were ideal partners. It was a combination of names which, although all that happened during three eventful seasons is now remote, is still as familiar in its ring as that of Gilbert and Sullivan. They made theatrical history in the little theatre far from the magic circle of the West End and holding no more than 800 people even when it was full—and that was not always the case—and they made it the centre of an intellectual movement.

The management's achievements were out of all proportion to the size and importance of the theatre. It brought Shaw, whose plays had hitherto been furtively produced at matinee performances, into the light and placed him on the road to international fame. It gave opportunity to young and unknown players and placed many

of them, too, on the road to success. Some of these names deserve recording. Here are a few : A. E. Matthews, Harcourt Williams, Lewis Casson, Dennis Eadie, Frederick Lloyd, Edmund Gwenn, Dorothy Minto, Graham Browne, Clare Greet.

Besides that many artistes of established popularity appeared in the productions, among them Ellen Terry, Frederick Kerr, J. H. Barnes, Norman McKinnel, Fanny Brough, Grace Lane, Louis Calvert, Ben Webster and Lillah McCarthy.

Vedrenne and Granville-Barker did not concern themselves with commercial considerations. They were inspired with a single artistic purpose. Their productions were simple but adequate. They discovered new playwrights, in particular helping John Galsworthy and St. John Hankin to develop their talents.

The company by continuously performing together built up a perfect ensemble. Shaw very often took an active part in staging his plays. One who saw every play performed at the Court has described the productions as "masterly".

During the three seasons eleven of Shaw's plays were performed—six of them for the first time. Among the plays produced were Shaw's *Candida*, *Major Barbara*, *How He Lied to Her Husband*, *John Bull's Other Island*, *Man and Superman*, *You Never Can Tell* and *The Philanderer*; Professor Gilbert Murray's beautiful translations of *Electra* and the *Hippolytus* of Euripides; Laurence Housman and Granville-Barker's exquisite fantasy *Prunella*; John Galsworthy's *The Silver Box*; Granville-Barker's *The Voysey Inheritance*; St. John Hankin's *The Return of the Prodigal* and *The Charity That Began at Home*; *The Convict on the Hearth*, a low-life study by Frederick Fenn; Maurice Hewlett's *Pan and the Young Shepherd* and *The Younger of the Angels*.

So the little Court Theatre became the temple of high art and built up a following of intelligent playgoers even if it did not draw the general public to any great extent. People began to talk of the New Drama. Shaw became the playwright of the moment. Galsworthy was spoken of with admiration and respect. The Court was discussed and written about to an extent that must have excited the jealousy and envy of all the West End commercial managements and caused actor-managers to open their eyes in wonder. For every week almost there was some exciting new event and some new breach of theatrical convention. There was novelty in this. The West End theatre might go on presenting pieces that were exactly in accordance with what was regarded as representing

popular taste, plays which claimed attention because they dealt with amusing intrigues among the best kind of people, plays about dukes and duchesses and High Society in which manners and epigrams, settings and fashions were in the best of taste, plays of picturesque romance in which the improbable was performed with gallant flourish, plays about a delightful if impossible unreal world.

But at the Court it was different. Here the playgoer was invited to see something that related more or less to his own everyday existence, in which the common-or-garden folk of his kind were concerned, in which recognisable people were represented in quite probable situations and discussed problems that did concern the life of the average human being. They were being shown that there might be just as much interest in what happened to a clerk or a charwoman as to a duke or Mayfair hostess, and that outside the restricted fashionable world there was Life itself to be examined and explored and its social problems discussed.

Nevertheless the walls of Jericho did not fall and the fashionable commercial theatre and its actor-managers continued to flourish, for it cannot be said that the Court Theatre, though it attracted the most intelligent playgoers, was enough to satisfy the popular taste.

If there is any criticism of the Vedrenne-Barker policy to be made it is that it rather developed into the establishment of a theatre almost exclusively devoted to Shaw. When *The Philanderer* was produced (February, 1907) one popular newspaper headed its notice "Too Much Shaw at the Court Theatre" and asked: "Is the vogue of the Court Theatre already on the wane?" "No," it added, "but it soon will be if Messrs. Vedrenne and Barker blindly produce anything and everything that Mr. Shaw writes or ever wrote." In all, 701 performances of Shaw's plays were given against 287 of plays by other authors.

The movement certainly had one very notable effect. When Mr. Winston Churchill, a year or two later, went to see Galsworthy's *Justice*, at the Duke of York's Theatre, its prison scene so much impressed him that almost immediately some reform in the solitary confinement system was made.

The Vedrenne-Barker régime was an undoubted artistic success but, as the term would be interpreted by any commercial management, it was not a success financially. Yet no losses were shown and when the partners ended their management after three years of hard work and idealistic endeavour and after having transferred their

management for a brief period in 1907 to the Savoy Theatre (without success), they were able each to draw out £1,500.

That was a return to excite no envy among commercial managements but the extent of the Vedrenne-Barker experiment must be measured by other standards. The effects were not only immediate ; they were far-reaching and more extensive than the partners could possibly have foreseen.

It is inconceivable, for instance, that, without their example, Charles Frohman, the American impresario, would have embarked upon his brief but memorable repertory season at the Duke of York's Theatre on February 21, 1910. It lasted only four months and was a financial failure but, during the season when Granville-Barker was one of the producers, eight new plays were introduced and there were two revivals. The new plays were Galsworthy's *Justice*, Shaw's *Misalliance*, Granville-Barker's *The Madras House*, Elizabeth Baker's *Chains*, Meredith's *The Sentimentalists*, Hope and Lennox's *Helena's Path* and J. M. Barrie's *Old Friends* and *The Twelve Pound Look*. The revivals were Pinero's *Trelawny of the Wells* and Laurence Housman and Granville-Barker's *Prunella*.

Again, the Court Theatre example obviously inspired Lena Ashwell when she entered into management at the Kingsway Theatre, just as it also inspired Gertrude Kingston in her season at the Little and brought about Tree's Afternoon Theatre at His Majesty's where a series of matinee performances began in November 1908. A production of Hauptmann's *Hannele* was a notable feature. Tree had certainly begun to notice the New Drama and to recognise its challenge and all that it portended in the effort to interest the general public.

But more than this the movement inaugurated at the Court penetrated into the provinces and it must be accounted as the real origin of the now widespread repertory movement.

It began when the great philanthropic patron and benefactor of the theatre, the wealthy Miss A. E. F. Horniman, established the first English repertory company at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, in September 1907. Miss Horniman had already extended her patronage to the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. She rebuilt the theatre, let it rent free to the Irish National Theatre and from 1904 gave it an annual subsidy.

The repertory movement spread from Manchester to Scotland when in September 1909 Alfred Wareing established the Scottish Repertory Company at the Royalty Theatre. Liverpool followed

two years later and within a few years the repertory system had considerably changed the aspect of the theatre throughout the provinces.

The movement naturally was not without its effect upon ordinary commercial enterprise and to it must be traced the more adventurous choice of plays subsequently shown in the Edwardian theatre by many productions which, only a few years previously, would have been shunned by any manager who considered himself reasonably sane.

Such was the effect of the Vedrenne-Barker régime, which appeared a modest enough enterprise when it began, which lasted only three years but was destined to have a lasting effect upon our stage. If this had been the only contribution to theatrical history during King Edward's reign it would have made the period notable and worthy of respect.

* * *

I have already written enough to prove that the early years of the century were a period of intellectual ferment and excitement in the theatre and full of excellent variety of interest. Yet I have said nothing of another feature sufficient in itself to show that playgoers of the time were ready to support intelligent activity in the theatre.

I refer to the fact that for many years there was a constant supply of foreign drama in London. Indeed, I imagine there never was a period when the public displayed a more cosmopolitan taste—or, at least, had the opportunity of cultivating such taste by seeing many of the leading artistes from Paris as well as the best of comedy and drama that France and Germany could provide. The world has grown smaller, distances have shrunk and communications—except during the intervals of war and the aftermath—have become easier. But despite that we have had nothing to compare for many years with the variety of cosmopolitan interest shown in the theatre of Edwardian times.

For instance, it is now hard to believe that for six years or so London supported a German theatre which had regular seasons, mostly at the Great Queen Street (later Kingsway) Theatre. It was established by Herr Andreson, a very capable actor and producer, in January 1902.

Week after week this company of German artistes presented plays representing all the best in their national drama, including the latest



Scene in *The Duchess of Danzig*, Lyric Theatre, 1903.



ISABEL JAY and G. P. HUNTLEY in *Miss Hook of Holland*, Prince of Wales's Theatre, 1907.



G. P. HUNTLEY, EDNA MAY and MAURICE FARKOA in *Kitty Grey*, Apollo Theatre, 1901.



The Race scene in *The Arcadians* with the principal artistes in the foreground, Shaftesbury Theatre, 1909.



See See at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, 1906. LILY ELSIE is on the right hand of the trio.

of modern plays as well as the cream of the classics. In one season alone it presented plays by Schiller, Sudermann, Grillparzer, Anzengruber, Gutzkow, as well as by Ibsen, Björnson and Gorky and lighter pieces by Fulda, Ernst Meyer-Förster and Kindelberg, all with adequate staging and casting. Their work in providing an accurate reflection of German thought and manners, and—for at the time the German theatre was probably the most advanced in Europe—phases of life quite neglected by English and French dramatists, was invaluable.

Hardly a year passed in which London was not visited by the most eminent artistes of the French theatre. During 1902 the Garrick Theatre was occupied in three successive seasons by Sarah Bernhardt, Jeanne Granier and Coquelin *ainé*. In the following year *Veronique* had its first presentation in London by a French company at the Coronet Theatre, Notting Hill, and this was followed by French seasons during which Jane Hading (then at the height of her charm and beauty) was seen in *La Seconde Mme. Tanqueray*. After that came the Gymnase company in *Le Secret de Polichinelle*.

In the same year Bernhardt appeared at the Adelphi and she was followed by Duse in *Hedda Gabler*, *Francesca da Rimini*, *La Gioconda* and *Magda*. Réjane and Jeanne Granier were visitors also.

In 1904 Bernhardt and Mrs. Patrick Campbell appeared at the Vaudeville in *Pélleas et Mélisande* and Réjane had a season at the Prince of Wales's. In 1905 Coquelin presented *Notre Jeunesse* and *L'Abbé Constantine*, at the Garrick, Duse played an Italian version of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, at the Waldorf, and Réjane had another season at Terry's.

In 1906 Gaston Meyer opened the restored and enlarged Royalty as a "Théâtre Français de Londres" and under his management were seen such artistes as Bernhardt, Réjane, Simone le Bargy, Coquelin, Georges Berr, Marthe Regnier, that superb comedian Felix Galipaux and Antoine of the "Théâtre Libre".

In 1908 the Grand Guignol had a season at the Shaftesbury and it was followed by a season of Offenbachian operetta. In 1909 Lucien Guitry appeared at the Adelphi in *L'Assommoir*, *Le Voleur* and *Crainquebille*.

This by no means was the sum of foreign drama. Otojiro Kawakami, "the Irving of Japan", had a season at the Criterion in 1901 and there were other Japanese performances at the Savoy in 1905. In 1907 London heard for the first time Offenbach's *Hoffmans Erzählungen* ("The Tales of Hoffman") when it was

presented at the Adelphi by the Komische Oper of Berlin and in 1909 the Russian actress Lydia Yavorskaïa (Princess Bariatinsky) appeared at His Majesty's.

When, in 1908, the Sicilian players were seen at the Shaftesbury they were the theatrical sensation of the year. London had never seen anything like the primitive passions which these fiery artistes displayed in their native drama in such pieces as *Malia*, *Morte Civile* and *Feudalismo*. Their leading artiste Cav. Grasso was an extraordinary artiste of volcanic energy and blazing emotions. They visited London again in the following year.

In 1907 London had its first experience of the Irish National Theatre from Dublin. The novelty of the soft poetic diction has now worn off but how fresh it was to the London playgoers of that time and what a revelation of strange new beauty.

The Playboy of the Western World had caused riotous scenes in Dublin and that was the exciting play with which a company, including Arthur Sinclair, Maire O'Neill, Sara Allgood, W. G. Fay and J. M. Kerrigan, opened at the Great Queen Street Theatre. The play was greatly acclaimed by the critics. This is what *The Times* said of it :

"Mr. Synge's play appeals to us primarily as a work of art, so delicate, so 'strange' and individual, that we cannot force ourselves into caring whether it is or will be, fair on Mayo or not. In construction, character and dialogue this is the best play that Mr. Synge has yet written ; and its setting, its incidents and its treatment are so unfamiliar as to double its value in the eyes of English theatre-goers. And more, we cannot help feeling that we could forgive everything to people who talk like that, with those dreamy melancholy voices, that soft rippling accent, those delicious inflexions and that way of making points by what seems far subtler means than ours."

XVII

SHAW, GALSWORTHY AND GRANVILLE-BARKER

SHAW BELONGS SO MUCH TO OUR OWN TIMES THAT THERE IS little need for me to describe in detail the plays of his that were presented at the Court Theatre during the Vedrenne-Barker management. They were the most successful feature of that enterprise; most of them have been constantly performed ever since, and, with the sole exception of Shakespeare, no British dramatist has ever gained a wider reading public.

But though his first play, *Widowers' Houses* was performed by the Independent Theatre as long ago as 1892, followed by *Arms and the Man* which was publicly performed at the Avenue in 1894, how different was his status before the Court Theatre experiment began compared with his present world-wide fame. In those far-off days Shaw had certainly made himself known but it was chiefly as a music and dramatic critic of pronouncedly unorthodox views, as a Fabian speaker and pamphleteer, a fiery, red-bearded Socialist and vestryman, an expounder of Wagner, Ibsen and Nietzsche, rather than as a playwright. Some of his plays had been published in attractively printed editions under the titles of *Plays for Puritans* and *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*. It was for the Court Theatre to lift him into popularity and into the beginning of his undying fame.

The Shaw plays at the Court were extensively written about by the critics and won the approval of the limited intelligentsia, but they came as something of a shock to the general playgoer accustomed to the nice conventions of the current drama. It is perhaps interesting to get a glimpse of how his plays were greeted by the Press in those days.

One of the most popular of his plays produced was *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*. When he wrote it it is known that he had Ellen Terry in mind for the part of Lady Cecily Waynflete though when it had its first (private) performance by the Stage Society in 1901 it was seen with Janet Achurch in that role. Later she played the part in the first public performance which was at Manchester in the following year. The Court Theatre production was its first public performance in London.

In *The Tribune* William Archer described it as "not the best but one of the pleasantest and most entertaining of his plays". "Above all things, and most fortunately," he wrote, "it is a portrait of a lady. Mr. Shaw has drawn no more human, more rounded, more truly poetical character type than Lady Cecily Waynflete. For this good deed much may be forgiven him. Lady Cecily has none of the pedantry which detracts from the charm of *Candida*; she is not, like Ann Whitefield, a mythological nightmare begotten by ill-digested philosophy. She is wayward, she is sparkling, she is irresistible. In a word she combines the temperament of Ellen Terry with the wit of Bernard Shaw."

To-day we look upon *You Never Can Tell* as a very delightful, entertaining and particularly harmless farce. It is probably forgotten that it was originally accepted by the Harrison and Maude management for production at the Haymarket and was actually withdrawn after having been put into rehearsal. The management had belated misgivings. Possibly they thought that playgoers were not educated up to the high standard of the Shavian way of thinking. At the Court it became one of the best draws of the repertory seasons.

Of *Candida* L. F. Austin wrote in the *Daily Chronicle* that it was the nearest approach to a comedy that Shaw had achieved. "Its characters at times do behave like human beings and not like animated bundles of paradoxes," he said. "There is less than usual of that piercing gaze into milestones which passes with Mr. Shaw as philosophic insight."

But he questioned the reasonableness of the story, saying that at the end of the play there were cries for the author "who might have explained the whole thing as one of his humorous discourses. But he had fled. Perhaps the absurdity of the story had staggered even him."

When *The Philanderer* was produced the *Daily Mail* said, "Mr. Shaw we all know can be delightfully amusing; he can also be very dull. *The Philanderer* is an example of Mr. Shaw in a dull, unskilful and not particular refined mood." In all truth it is very inferior Shaw.

The *Illustrated London News* referred to *Man and Superman* (in which Granville-Barker played John Tanner, Lillah McCarthy, Ann Whitefield and Edmund Gwenn, Straker, the chauffeur) as "a so-called comedy" and "well expressing as no other work has done Mr. Shaw's most mature notions of the sex . . . representing

the very mouthpiece of the Shavian sex philosophy captured by an all-conquering and fascinating woman”.

The same critic described *John Bull's Other Island* as “not a play but something more interesting—scenes of loosely connected, almost disconnected scenes in which the dramatist expressed a multitude of views on the problems of the Emerald Isle”.

Frank Harris acidly expressed a wholesale dislike of Shaw in a comprehensive article in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. “I am compelled to say”, he wrote, “that I consider *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* a wretched piece of work, only rendered possible by the fine acting of Miss Ellen Terry. *You Never Can Tell* is a little playlet with a thin vein of humour and a pretty little love episode. In each of these plays Mr. Shaw shows more intelligence than temperament: none of his characters lives for a moment; they have lymph in their veins or perhaps ichor, but certainly not blood.” As for *John Bull's Other Island*, he added, “First of all it isn't a play at all; it is a piece of first-rate journalism set forth in various masks upon the stage. It hardly ever goes higher than first-rate journalism and it goes very low indeed.”

The Doctor's Dilemma came in for the most vigorous criticism of all his plays. Shaw wrote this piece, with its debunking of the medical profession, in response to a challenge from William Archer who had suggested that he could not write a death scene. The clinical detail of the medical discussions rather bewildered the critics, though they praised the performances of the various types of doctor represented. Most of them were shocked by the dying speech of Louis Dubedat, the artist who so eloquently proclaimed his belief in Michael Angelo, Velasquez and Rubens.

E. A. Baughan said that Shaw had pitted himself against a big idea and had failed. He said the doctors revealed their incompetence and dishonesty *à la* Shaw: “That is to say they all do and say things which they would not say and do in real life. That is a formula of the author's and I, for one, am heartily tired of it. The bad taste of the whole play, which makes a superficial mock of what are serious issues in life, finds its climax in this the death scene and in the buffoonery that follows it.”

William Archer found many faults in the Archer-inspired piece but said that up to the end of the second act it was the most brilliant thing that Shaw had written, adding “Mr. Shaw has never been more witty, more penetrating and (in a sense) more human.”

Anthony L. Ellis described it as “a drama of passion divorced

from passion, a human story divorced from humanity". "Not tragedy at all but something like a farcical melodrama," commented the *Illustrated London News*. "It is a travesty in rather hideous taste."

"If he wrote it to prove that he is sufficient master of his art to set upon the stage a death scene that shall be neither farcical nor melodramatic but a faithful picture of the one grandly solemn moment in the comedy of life we say emphatically that he has failed," said the *Daily Mail*. "We hold that the death of Louis Dubedat is a bungling, ineffective, theatrical touch and must have disgusted many members of the audience and certainly left the rest indifferent."

Looking back upon the spate of Shaw at the Court Theatre J. T. Grein once wrote: "Early Shaw struck people with its torrential loquacity, overtaking the playgoer's bewildered mind because all that he had to say was charged with thought and new ideas, whimsical perversions, the formlessness of the plays and the characters alternating between the fantastic and the real. Already in Germany where Shaw is regarded with greater respect as a prophet than at home they have predicted that if he continues in the vein of *The Doctor's Dilemma* his plays will become forgotten as rapidly as they have become fashionable."

If the Court Theatre venture brought Shaw into prominence it did even more for John Galsworthy for it was completely responsible for giving the novelist his first opportunity as a playwright. In so doing it founded a new school of dramatists imbued with sympathy for the under-dog and tackling social problems without sacrificing (as Shaw undoubtedly so very often did) the necessities of dramatic form.

In *The Silver Box* Galsworthy exhibited his characteristic qualities at their best. It was a good, well-shaped and deeply interesting play measured by any standard, this story of the poor man who, driven by hard necessity, stole the silver box and was sent to prison while, by ironic circumstance, the rich man's son escaped the penalty for robbing a prostitute.

"This play", wrote *The Stage*, "is more than a social satire; it is informed by a genuine sympathy for those who are willing to work but are unable to obtain work and thus might be classed as a drama with a purpose."

William Archer described it as "an indictment of society, all the more telling because it is studiously unemphatic and unrhetical.

It presents a sober picture of any everyday incident, a police-court case of the most commonplace order and then it leaves us to reflect upon our responsibility for the state of things, the economic muddle of which this case is the outcome."

"Although his play shows a needless disregard of the architectural side of the playwright's craft," wrote E. A. Baughan, "it has the stuff of drama in it. . . . His play has the supreme merit of dealing with sordid characters in such a way that they interest us. This is not the play of a hard, cynical realist but of a man who sees life as it is and sees it with sympathy. The play as a whole is sympathetic and charitable."

The *Illustrated London News* praised it as "a brilliant study of middle-class manners". "Mr. Galsworthy", said the critic, "has already made his mark as an uncompromising realist in fiction and *The Silver Box* is just a slice of actual life artistically presented without exaggeration."

J. T. Grein in the *Sunday Times* was eloquent about the "bioscopic views of life" which the play afforded. "We can boast", he said, "of a new playwright, we can boast of having seen acting equal to the best on the Continent. Let us take heart. There is life in the old British theatre yet."

Few of the Vedrenne-Barker productions were more notable for acting than this play. A. E. Matthews as the scapegrace son was greeted as "superb" by several not usually excitable critics; Norman McKinnel brought just the right realistic touch to the desperate thief, Jones, and there was enthusiastic praise for the touching performance given by Irene Rooke as Mrs. Jones. And it was generally agreed that a court scene had never been presented with greater realism.

Galsworthy's subsequent plays of the period were *Strife* (Duke of York's, 1909) and *Justice* with which Charles Frohman inaugurated his repertory venture at the same theatre in 1910. *Strife*, depicting the struggle between capitalist employer and the workers and ending, after exhausting both sides, in victory for neither, was a piece of grim realism in which the author, while constructing a play of strong and exciting dramatic merit, fairly held the balance between the parties. One critic said its situations "cut like a knife at one's heartstrings. Painful though its realism may be to those who seek fairy tales in the theatre *Strife* must rank as one of the most strenuous and remarkable dramas of modern times."

J. T. Grein was enthusiastic in his praise. "Galsworthy", he

wrote, "never swerved from his purpose and one feels that his heart was with the men, pleading for labour and accusing Capital. . . . Nor were his characters the mouthpieces of a theorist. Some indeed are the incarnation of principles; such as old Anthony, the idealist Edgar, the fanatic Roberts—but they are human beings as they stand before us; even without the aid of scenic representation we see the outline of their personality; they are characters of our time strong in vitality, individual in thought. . . . It is such drama that we want, such drama that will lift our stage as well as our national reputation. For whereas it entertains us to the pitch of excitement it impels reflection on that paramount question—the question of uniting Capital and Labour with fair play on both sides."

Then *Justice* confronted the theatre-goer with the even grimmer picture of the inhumanity of the working of the criminal law. As I have already mentioned it accomplished a practical result in the reformation of the conditions of solitary confinement.

Such problems as Galsworthy presented were likely to trouble the conscience of the sensitive and thoughtful playgoer. It can be imagined how the rude facts, treated with such veracity to life, must have struck those accustomed to considering nothing more violent than the artificially contrived disputes and arguments of the domestic scene. Galsworthy's plays were undoubtedly the expression of a fine mind deeply concerned with the genuine problems of social conditions. No one would question his sincerity, his humanitarian outlook and his deadly earnest reforming spirit. It is evident that he sought to use the stage primarily as a platform for airing his views. They might with other authors have been presented in less interesting and enthralling form, but it just happened that he had the constructive and selective skill that enabled him to shape them into a striking and effective dramatic form. He made his plays lifelike with well conceived characters, with natural-sounding dialogue, devoid of exaggeration or the suggestion of epigram. The facts alone were eloquent enough.

What most detracts from his plays as a whole is his lack of humour and the rather chilling air of Olympian pity and patronage for poor, depressed humanity—a species not so extensive as his special examples and generalisations would suggest. It runs through most of his plays. Some vitalising element is missing from them, for though the themes which they enshrine seem just as urgent now, and the sentiments that he expresses have lost no validity, and

though little of the dialogue in which they are shaped appears to date, they are now, alas ! as dead as mutton.

Granville-Barker whose *The Marrying of Ann Leete* had been presented in 1902, was able to exhibit the greatness of his talent in *The Voysey Inheritance* during the Court seasons and later on, during the Frohman season at the Duke of York's, in *The Madras House*. In collaboration with Laurence Housman he had shown the charm of an exquisite fancy in the Pierrot play *Prunella*—surely one of the most delicate and purely delightful fantasies that has graced the English stage.

Far removed from this was *Waste*, his most powerful play which, having been banned by the Censor, was produced by the Stage Society at the Imperial Theatre in 1907. It was William Archer who described *The Voysey Inheritance* and *Waste* as "two of the greatest plays of our time".

Waste is the story of Henry Trebell, a rising young politician who falls in love with a married woman. She is about to bear his child but, unable to face the scandal, undergoes an illegal operation which is fatal. As it happens on the eve of Trebell's promotion to Cabinet rank the result is disaster to his political career. Ostracised and socially ruined he commits suicide—the tragic waste of a promising and useful life.

"The play", wrote A. B. Walkley in *The Times*, "is a work of extraordinary power, dealing with some of the most fundamental facts of human life with an unflinching truthfulness and, at the same time, blending these facts with the most vivid and probably the most authentic presentation we have yet had on the English stage of great social and political questions that come home to the Englishman's business and bosoms."

But he added his reservation: "For our part we have no hesitation in praising the Censor's decision. The subject matter of *Waste*, together with the sincere realism with which it is treated makes it in our judgment wholly unfit for performance under ordinary conditions before a public of various ages, moods and standards of intelligence."

What, of course, offended the Censor was the subject of abortion. How unfortunate for the British drama and what a loss to the credit of the Edwardian period, that the stage should have been robbed of such a notable piece of playwriting. However, as *The Stage Year Book* for 1908 said: "That the Lord Chamberlain should have stood between this play and the public is surely not very material

except in so far as the act showed the irresponsible power of the censorship. That is to say it is altogether anomalous and bad that the purview of a great and popular art should be subject absolutely to limitation by one man. But had *Waste* been free to go to the public it is unlikely that they would have wanted the play. Its fine moments in the revelation of character, its flashes of dynamic power—it had many of both—would not have reconciled the public to an ugly subject and a wordy method. Mr. Barker is still ‘finding’ himself.”

Granville-Barker was a much finer artiste than Galsworthy. Limited though his output was—for he devoted his energy greatly to the business of management and production—he enriched the theatre with a superb intellectual force at a time when it was stirring with other movements. He was a strict realist and the figures in his plays depicted with extraordinary subtlety the minds and thoughts and manners of genuinely living people. His greatest virtue was his skill in characterisation; his greatest defect that he was inclined to make them unduly prolix, with all the hesitations and repetitions that flesh-and-blood people do, of course, indulge in. This can be detected, for instance, in a passage from the scene from *Waste* in which Henry Trebell’s mistress, Amy O’Connell, tells him that she is about to bear his child:

AMY (*her voice breaking, her carefully calculated control giving way*): Oh Henry . . . Henry!

TREBELL: Are you in trouble?

AMY: You’ll hate me but . . . oh it’s brutal of you to have been away so long.

TREBELL: Is it your husband?

AMY: Perhaps. Oh come nearer to me . . . do.

TREBELL (*coming near without haste or excitement*): Well? (*Her eyes are closed.*) My dear girl, I’m too busy for love-making. Now if there are any facts to be faced let me hear them quickly.

She looks up at him for a moment; then she speaks swiftly and sharply as one speaks of disaster.

AMY: There’s danger of my having a child . . . your child . . . some time in April. That’s all.

TREBELL (*a sceptic who has seen a vision*): Oh . . . it’s impossible.

AMY (*flashing at him revengefully*): Why?

TREBELL (*brought to his usual self*): Well, are you sure?

AMY (*in sudden agony*): D’you think I want it to be true? D’you think I—you can’t know what it is to have a thing happening in spite of you.

TREBELL (*his face set in thought*): Where have you been since we met?

AMY : Not to Ireland. I haven't seen Justin for a year.

TREBELL : All the easier for you not to see him for another year.

AMY : That wasn't what you meant.

TREBELL : It wasn't, but never mind.

They are silent for a moment . . . miles apart. Then she speaks dully.

AMY : We do hate each other . . . don't we ?

TREBELL : Nonsense. Let's think of what matters.

AMY (*aimlessly*) : I went to a man at Dover . . . picked him out of a directory . . . didn't give my name . . . pretended I was off abroad. . . . He was a kind old thing ; said it was all most satisfactory. Oh, my God !

Then, a little later in the scene :

TREBELL : Nature's a tyrant.

AMY : Oh, it's my punishment . . . I see that well enough . . . for thinking myself so clever . . . forgetting my duty and religion . . . not going to confession, I mean. (*Then hysterically.*) God can make you believe in Him when He likes, can't He ?

TREBELL (*with comfortable strength*) : My dear girl, this needs all your pluck. (*And he sits by her.*) All we have to do is to prevent it being found out.

AMY : Yes . . . the scandal would smash you, wouldn't it ?

TREBELL : There isn't going to be any scandal.

AMY : No . . . if we're careful. You'll tell me what to do, won't you ! Oh, it's a relief to be able to talk about it.

TREBELL : For one thing you must take care of yourself and stop worrying.

It soothes her to feel that he is concerned ; but it is not enough to be soothed.

AMY : Yes, I wouldn't like to be the means of smashing you, Henry . . . especially as you don't care for me.

TREBELL : I intend to care for you.

AMY : Love me, I mean. I wish you did a little, then perhaps I wouldn't feel so degraded.

TREBELL (*a shade impatiently*) : I can say I love you if that'll make things easier.

AMY (*more helpless than ever*) : If you'd said that at first I should be taking it for granted . . . though it wouldn't be any more true, I dare say than now . . . when I should know you were telling the truth.

It is clear that Granville-Barker was always more concerned in the personality of his characters than with the development of his theme.

There are brilliant character studies in *The Voyage Inheritance*, studies of an upper middle-class suburban set of people—a wealthy

old family solicitor, father, mother, sons and daughters, together with a son-in-law, daughters-in-law and a cousin, all involved in the revelation that old Mr. Voysey has for years been living by gambling with the money of his clients. His son Edward is aghast when this state of affairs is disclosed, and with the knowledge that he is inheriting from his much respected and outwardly most respectable father a business founded upon fraud.

And, again, in *The Madras House* there is a wealth of observation, humour and realism in the drawing of its many characters—the suburban family (mostly female) of Henry Huxtable and the inmates (for that is all one can call them) of the Huxtable drapery establishment, the unfortunate assistants enduring the restrictions of the “living-in” system. It is a story of repression, of rebellion and of frustration, of emotionally crushed womanhood, marred only by the rather loose connection of the different elements and by the wordy uncertainty of the last act. But how good the dialogue is, despite the prolixity.

Observe how much is achieved in painting the atmosphere of the house at Denmark Hill where the Huxtables and their six unmarried daughters live. This is a snatch of the Sunday afternoon conversation between Emma Huxtable and her cousin Philip:

PHILIP (*quizzically*): You're all too good, Emma.

EMMA: Yes. I heard you making fun of Julia in the conservatory. But if one had stopped doing one's duty what would happen to the world? (*Her voice now takes that tone which is the well-bred substitute for the wink.*) I say . . . I suppose I oughtn't to tell you about Julia, but it's rather a joke. You know how Julia gets hysterical when her headaches last too long.

PHILIP: Does she?

EMMA: Well, a collar marked Owen Nares came back from the wash in mistake for one of father's. I don't think he lives near here, but it's one of these big steam laundries. And Morgan the cook got it and she gave it to Julia . . . and Julia kept it. And when mother found out she cried for a whole day. She said it showed a wanton mind.

PHILIP's *mocking face becomes grave.*

PHILIP: I don't think that's at all amusing, Emma.

EMMA (*in genuine surprise*): Don't you?

PHILIP: How old is Julia?

EMMA: She's thirty-four. (*Her face falls, too.*) No . . . it is rather dreadful, isn't it? (*Then wrinkling her forehead as at a puzzle.*) It isn't exactly that one wants to get married. I daresay mother is right about that.

PHILIP: About what?

EMMA : Well, some time ago, a gentleman proposed to Jane. And mother said it would have been more honourable if he had spoken to father first, and that Jane was the youngest and too young anyhow to know her own mind. Well, you know, she's twenty-six. And they heard of something he'd once done and it was put a stop to. And Jane was very rebellious and mother cried . . .

PHILIP : Does she always cry ?

EMMA : Yes, she does cry if she's upset about us. And I think she was right. One ought not risk being unhappy for life, ought one ?

PHILIP : Are you all so happy now, then ?

EMMA : Oh, deep down I think we are. It would be ungrateful not to be. When one has a good home and . . . But of course living together and being together all the time, one does get a little irritable now and then. We sit as mum as maggots when people are here . . .

PHILIP : But what do you girls do ?

EMMA : We keep busy. There's lots to be done about the house and there's the Parish . . . and of course we've our friends . . . and tennis. Julia used to sketch quite well. D'you think novels and newspapers tell you the truth about things, Philip ?

PHILIP : Some novels may. Why ?

EMMA : Because you'd think from them there wasn't anyone else in England like us. But I know lots . . .

St. John Hankin with *The Two Mr. Wetherbys* (1903), *The Return of the Prodigal* (1905), *The Charity That Began at Home* (1906), *The Cassilis Engagement* (1907) and *The Last of the De Mullins* (1908) was another example of the Court Theatre school, with some slight affinity to Shaw but a closer resemblance to Galsworthy and Granville-Barker, although he had less depth of thought. He was concerned with ideas and treated them with a touch of cynicism, notably in *The Return of the Prodigal*. In this play a ne'er-do-well son, having squandered his allowance in Australia returns to be an embarrassment to his respectable father and his prim, correct brother. *The Cassilis Engagement* and *The Last of the De Mullins* were plays about caste and social convention.

Reviewing *The Return of the Prodigal* the *Daily Mail* critic (who rudely dismissed the dialogue as "twaddle, twaddle, twaddle") hit upon one of the characteristics of the Court Theatre-repertory type of play when he wrote : "Mr. Hankin, we understand, is a young man but he belongs to the old school of playwrights. He still believes that no play can be artistic that ends happily ; whereas, of course, nothing is less artistic than the unhappy ending that is not logical and inevitable. This was the chief fault of *The Return of the Prodigal* and it is the worst fault of *The Charity That Began at*

Home. If Mr. Hankin would only be honest with himself and not bother about drawing-room chatteringers he would write an excellent comedy."

It must be acknowledged that while Shaw, Galsworthy and Granville-Barker, bringing new ideas and a new technique into the theatre, did on the whole exercise a great and beneficial influence upon the current trend in playwriting by widening its intellectual appeal, they stimulated many of their less gifted followers into copying the defects of their methods and approaches.

Shaw prompted many to replace action and characterisation by endless talk. Concerning *The Charity That Began at Home*, for instance, J. T. Grein pointed out that "For a grain of wit and an ounce of wisdom which sets us thinking, he gives us a pound of discussion which is not always very entertaining and, arrayed round the meagre action, produces a feeling of languor."

It fell to Galsworthy to elevate the failure (exemplified by such spineless figures as Falder) into the position of hero, and there were many of other rather dreary people in his plays. How often have we seen copies of these dull and ineffectual figures dragging out their weary and futile existences in plays of the repertory school? Olympian pity for the *déclassé* was all very well but there is not much stimulation and elevation of soul to be obtained by regarding these lugubrious dwellers in misery and hopelessness. St. John Ervine was far from exaggerating when he wrote: "Democracy had taken the heart out of the theatre. People went to repertory theatres as woebegonely and as if they had come to atone for lamentable sins. Had Irving come out of his grave to see what state the intellectual Bernard Shaw had reduced the romantic theatre he would have been exceptionally sardonic."

How often when, reduced to a suicidal state of mind by watching these grim and gloomy would-be realistic studies of depressed lives and hopeless failure, have I longed for something artificial and cheerful to happen. I have had tantalising longings for the witty superficialities of Wilde, for the dashing and impossible heroics of Lewis Waller, for some glimpse of happiness, kindness, high spirits, triumphant endeavour and worldly success.

I very much doubt if all these studies of failure and depression were always any more true to life than anything contained in Pinero, Jones or Sutro. In my experience there were and are vast numbers of cheerful working men, shop assistants and clerks in this country. Who else indulge in pubs, football, variety shows, beanfeasts and

such jollifications? Do not shop assistants and clerks throng the "Proms" and exhibit every sign of happiness, vitality, intelligence and freedom of spirit? And so they did when the century was young. Yet you rarely met a cheerful one of the kind in the Galsworthy-inspired repertory play: they were always far too busy being oppressed and depressed.

Elizabeth Baker was one of those who depicted these drab creatures. Her *Chains*, produced during the Frohman repertory season at the Duke of York's, was a study of suburban domestic life, its principal characters being Charley Wilson, a clerk, his unimaginative wife with whom he was moderately contented and a lodger who, tired of London life, resolves to sail for Australia. Suddenly Charley feels the spirit of revolt, too, and makes up his mind to join him, only to find that his wife is about to have a baby. So the dream of freedom fades away. He is held down by the chains of habit and convention. Charley expresses himself in such terms as these:

"But I'll tell you what, marriage shouldn't tie a man up as if he were a slave. I don't want to desert Lily—she's my wife and I'm proud of it—but because I am married, am I never to strike out in anything? People like us are just cowards. We seize on the first soft job—and there we stick, like whipped dogs. We're afraid to ask for anything, afraid to ask for a rise even—we wait till it comes. And when the boss says he won't give you one—do we up and say 'Then I'll go somewhere where I can get more?' Not a bit of it! What's the good of sticking on here all our lives? Why shouldn't somebody risk something sometimes? We're all so jolly frightened—we've got no spunk—that's where the others get the hold over us—we slog on day after day, and when they cut our wages down we take it as meek as Moses. We're not men, we're machines. Next week I've got my choice—either to take less money to keep my job or to chuck it and try something else. You say—everybody says—keep the job. I expect I shall—I'm a coward like all of you—but what I want to know is, why can't a man have a fit of restlessness and all that, without being thought a villain?"

In other words "What's the use of anyfink? Why, nuffink," as Chevalier used to sing. It was in such unheroic sentiments as this that the ineffectual downtrodden were wont to express themselves in a succession of repertory plays, the inspiration of which, alas! can be traced back to the Court Theatre. But, of course, that was only a minor defect of a brave endeavour.

Optimism about the advance of the theatre was a little chilled in 1910 by the failure of Charles Frohman's brief repertory venture

at the Duke of York's Theatre. E. A. Baughan made some wise observations about the matter. "There can be no disputing the fact", he wrote, "that the tendency is more than a passing phase. We await the coming of a genius who will open the windows of our theatre and let in the free, fresh wind of the heavens. He will not be an epigrammatist merely; he will not be a pessimist; he will not be a blasé spectator of existence, taking a ghoulish interest in the pettiness and hypocrisy of mankind; but just a dramatist with his finger on the pulse of life. Neither will he be a pseudo-literary dramatist, a dealer in literary antiquities or fantastic socialism; nor yet a facile manufacturer of blank verse. Above all he will be a realist in the finest sense of and a modern of his day . . ."

Further, he said, "I have come to hate the word 'realism' for it is used of untrue pictures of life. Experience does not teach us that men and women are thoroughly bad, petty and ignoble. A drama should be a sample of life, but should show us the good with it . . ."

And out of his experience during the Court régime and the Frohman experiment he expressed further pertinent views in *The Stage Year Book* of 1911. There were two questions to be answered, he said—Does London require a repertory theatre? and, Was Mr. Frohman's scheme likely to succeed on its merits? "The answer to the first question is a little difficult to make," he replied. "London is in a very different position from any other big city, inasmuch as it has more theatres. The repertory theatre is a necessity in a smaller town. In our provinces the travelling company has ousted the old stock company, and, as far as the public is concerned, with advantage. The idea of the modern repertory theatre is quite distinct from the old stock company, for it does not exist merely to give variety to the theatre-goers of a town, which was the *raison d'être* of the stock company, but to produce plays of an unusual type which may have artistic value of no great commercial success. . . . London needs no repertory theatre as far as variety is concerned; the London theatres viewed as a whole make a wonderful repertory theatre. We do need a special playhouse, however, at which drama, not of a commercial kind, may find a home. There must surely be a large number of people in London who are interested in the play as something more than a fleeting entertainment. At present our theatres are analogous to a number of publishing houses which issue nothing but popular novels . . ."

As to the Frohman failure he added that it was not at all clear that the method of alternating plays was the best possible for London. "At the same time", he added, "it was not the method that ruined the enterprise for London but the reliance of the manager on plays which did not attract even their special public. The Bernard Shaw discussion-play is all very well as a *jeu d'esprit*. *Getting Married* was amusing and it had a good idea behind it. *Misalliance* was a repetition of *Getting Married* without its wit, observation and humanity. It has no big central idea behind it and much of the play was the merest buffoonery. Mr. Granville-Barker's *Madras House* was amusing in places but it was very diffuse and apparently planless."

And he concluded with this shrewd observation: "There will never be a permanent special public for these scoffing dramas. . . . We do not want plays to be of owl-eyed seriousness and banter is a good thing in its way, but the stage is too fine an instrument for the expression of life to be suited only to pointless satire and intellectual buffoonery."

XVIII

THE CENSORSHIP INQUIRY

FOR MANY YEARS RESENTMENT AGAINST THE LORD CHAMBERLAIN'S long-established censorship of stage plays had been growing and it was considerably aggravated by the banning of several plays by Mr. G. A. Redford who, since 1895, had been the Examiner of Plays. Notable among the plays which had been banned for public performance were Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, Ibsen's *Ghosts*, Maeterlinck's *Monna Vanna*, Granville-Barker's *Waste*, Brieux' *Maternité* and *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont*, Shelley's *The Cenci* and Garnett's *The Breaking Point*. This had added fuel to the flames, and poor Mr. Redford—one-time bank manager, amateur of the drama and author of unpublished plays, who had been a personal friend of E. F. S. Piggott, his predecessor and had been selected from a number of applicants to succeed him after his death—became the target for much ridicule and abuse.

After the banning of Shaw's play the agitation against what was termed a tyrannical institution became more violent. Frivolous and immoral farces of no literary worth had been licensed, it was complained but works of art and importance by eminent men of letters had, in the interests of public morality, come under the ban of the Censor. That was what particularly annoyed the would-be reformers, who cannot be acquitted, one is inclined to think, of the perfectly human desire for a little self-advertisement.

They achieved it in liberal quantity when seventy-one of them—among them such notable dramatists and writers as Swinburne, Hardy, Meredith, Galsworthy, Shaw, Wells and Conrad, circulated a joint protest among the Press in 1907. The text of this letter was as follows :

The Prime Minister has consented to receive during next month a deputation from the following authors on the subject of the censorship of plays. In the meantime these authors, through your columns, enter a formal protest against this office, which was instituted for political, and not for so-called moral ends to which it is perverted—an office autocratic in procedure, opposed to the spirit of the Constitution, contrary to common justice and to common sense.

They protest against the power lodged in the hands of a single

official, who judges without a public hearing, and against whose dictum there is no appeal—to cast a slur on the good name and destroy the means of livelihood of any member of an honourable calling.

They assert that the censorship has not been exercised in the interests of morality, but has tended to lower the dramatic tone by appearing to relieve the public of the duty of moral judgment.

They ask to be freed from the menace hanging over every dramatist of having his work and the proceeds of his work destroyed at a pen's stroke by the arbitrary action of a single official, neither responsible to Parliament nor amenable to law.

They ask that their art be placed on the same footing as every other art.

They ask that they themselves be placed in the position enjoyed under the law by every other citizen.

To these ends they claim that the licensing of plays shall be abolished. The public is already sufficiently assured against managerial misconduct by the present yearly licensing of theatres which remains untouched by the measure of justice here demanded.

The seventy-one names of the protesters followed.

The Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, received the deputation which addressed him at considerable length, and it was effective, for in July 1908 a Joint Select Committee of the Lords and Commons was appointed. It consisted of Herbert Samuel (Chairman), the Earl of Plymouth, Lord Willoughby de Broke, Lord Newton, Lord Ribblesdale, Lord Gorell, Robert Harcourt, A. E. W. Mason, Col. M. Lockwood and Hugh Law.

The terms of reference were :

To inquire into the censorship of stage plays as constituted by the Theatres Act of 1843 and into the operations of the Acts of Parliament relating to the licensing and regulation of theatres and places of public entertainment and to report any alterations of the law or practice which may appear desirable.

The Committee in its twelve sittings examined forty-nine witnesses, including Mr. Redford, William Archer, Bernard Shaw, H. Granville-Barker, J. M. Barrie, Johnston Forbes-Robertson, Cecil Raleigh, John Galsworthy, Sir Herbert Tree, Sir William S. Gilbert, A. B. Walkley, Professor Gilbert Murray, Miss Lena Ashwell, George Alexander, George Edwardes, Oswald Stoll, Sir Arthur Pinero and Sir Squire Bancroft.

The first sitting was held on July 29, 1909. The daily reports of the proceedings made excellent copy for the newspapers. Officials, authors, playwrights of all kinds, actors, managers, critics and

acknowledged wits, gave evidence, taking as much relish in the business, it seemed, as did their eminent and learned examiners. A good deal of what was said was relevant to the questions under consideration, but much of it was very wide of the mark and many of the literary gentlemen took a splendid opportunity to air their particular fads and prejudices. As *The Times* subsequently observed : "Many of the witnesses were at once interesting and amusing and some even brilliant. . . . The atmosphere of the footlights seemed to have found its way into the committee room ; the witnesses felt that they were, in a sense, on the stage addressing a large public."

It was notable that while all the authors and playwrights were in favour of the abolition of the censorship—and, as far as most were concerned, particularly in favour of the abolition of the unhappy Mr. Redford—all the managers, London and provincial, spoke in its favour.

So many delightful, amusing and nonsensical things were said and so much that sheds a revealing light upon the tastes, and prejudices and trends of the time, that some extracts from the great mass of evidence deserve to be quoted.

Mr. G. A. Redford, the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays, described himself as a student of the drama.

As to the functions of his office he said it was impossible to describe what the principle might be. "There are no principles that can be defined," he said. "I was under Mr. Piggott (his predecessor) for a great many years—that is to say as a personal friend—and obtained an insight into the duties then."

"I presume that the personal opinion of the Examiner on the merit or demerit of a play does not enter into the question," said the Chairman.

"Not at all," said Mr. Redford. "I am not a critic."

"You do not read a play as though you were a dramatic critic?"

"No. I have a certain amount of dramatic insight or I could not understand the play."

Asked about the number of plays submitted to him since his appointment he replied "Seven thousand or so, I dare say," adding that forty-three had been refused and only thirty had been permanently prohibited.

Mr. William Archer, the dramatic critic, was asked : "Generally speaking what is the effect in your opinion of the censorship?"

"The effect", replied Mr. Archer emphatically, "is to depress

and to mutilate and actually keep out of existence—not only to destroy but keep out of existence—serious plays ; because many authors will not write serious plays under the threat of having them destroyed by a single veto of the Censor. On the other hand it is in the nature of the censorship to be indulgent, shall we say, to all lighter forms of frivolity which sometimes entrench very closely upon indecency and impropriety.”

“ And for particular reasons has it, in your opinion, prevented the progress of the British drama ? ”

“ It has ; it has prevented the development in the direction of serious drama, the serious treatment of life.”

He expressed the opinion that if Shakespeare were writing at that period it was doubtful whether such a play as *Othello*, if submitted to the censorship, or such a play as *Hamlet*—in which the question of incest arose—would be licensed.

“ I would like to sum up my view of the effect of the censorship ”, said Mr. Archer, “ by saying in sum that the Censor keeps serious drama down to the level of his own intelligence (and probably lower because of timidity) while he does not even pretend to keep the lighter drama up to the level of his own morality.”

Mr. Bernard Shaw naturally expressed even more emphatic views. He was asked by the Chairman : “ You do not object to a regulated control of the theatre but you object to an unregulated control of the theatre ? ”

“ I object ”, answered Mr. Shaw, “ to any control of the theatre that is not the ordinary control which is applied to all citizens. I object to the control of the theatre which excludes rights which are accorded to all other citizens in the conduct of their business and the pursuit of their livelihood.”

Therefore he considered that the existing censorship gave special protection to certain forms of impropriety “ by giving a licence to plays which are disgusting to the very last degree—by giving them a certificate which conveys the impression that they contain nothing objectionable . . . ”

He said that the Censor had licensed a great many plays which he would not have licensed if he had understood them.

“ Can you conceive cases in which it would be right in the public interest to suppress certain plays ? ” he was asked.

“ Certainly, if their production is found to be a legal offence,” replied Mr. Shaw. “ I do not claim exemption of the drama from the law in any sense. For instance, I myself am not only a

playwright, but a journalist. I am an author and I am a public speaker. In all these capacities I may offend against the law, and I am responsible for what I do ; but I am responsible to the law and not to Mr. Redford or the Lord Chamberlain."

"You think that any outrage on religion or attack upon religion, or ridicule of sacred personages should be allowed on the stage ?"

"I think it should. I think that the public would look after that. I think that the danger of crippling thought, the danger of obstructing the formation of the public mind by suppressing such representations, is far greater than any real danger that there is from such representations. The real difficulty, of course, is not to suppress such representations but, on the contrary, to bring them about. It is an extremely difficult thing to carry out on the stage anything that runs contrary to the opinions of a large body of people."

"If I may say so," he said later, "Lord Gorell's views (Lord Gorell was a member of the Committee) in respect of divorce and county courts are immoral and are shocking to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and are shocking to Lord Halsbury (another member) but they are conscientiously immoral, and in bringing them forward Lord Gorell is doing a very high public service in my opinion. Now, with regard to myself, as an immoral writer I need hardly say that I claim to be a conscientiously immoral writer."

He planted such other barbs as "A very large percentage of the performances which take place at present on the English stage under the censorship licence have for their object the stimulation of sexual desire" and "If you prosecute for incentives to sexual vice you immediately make it possible to prosecute a manager because the principal actress has put on a pretty hat or is a pretty woman."

Asked if his play *Mrs. Warren's Profession* had been proceeded against in New York he replied, "*Mrs. Warren's Profession* was proceeded against in New York and it was proceeded against in a very summary manner. In consequence of the Lord Chamberlain having refused to license it here an uproar was created in America, naturally because it was a hideously indecent and horrible play, because, as the American public were aware that many plays which are licensed here are exceedingly indecent, they naturally concluded that anything that the Censor refused to license must be of almost incredible indecency *a fortiori*. As a consequence of that, all the worst elements in the New York population came in enormous

crowds. There were almost riots outside the theatre and fabulous prices were paid for seats. The police then went in and arrested the entire company, and marched them off to the police court—actors, actresses, manager and everybody else. The magistrate had to adjourn the case, to read the play and he publicly expressed his extreme loathing of the unpleasant task before him. At the next hearing he exhibited a certain amount of temper, which, one would almost think, suggested disappointment.”

The result, he said, was that he was acquitted, that it was decided there was nothing in the words themselves or in phrase or expression which could be said to be indecent.

Mr. Shaw disagreed with Mr. Archer’s statement that the time had gone by when an adverse decision of the Censor could affect an author prejudicially. “The impression produced that I am an indecent, unconscientious author”, he said, “is one which will follow me to the very end of my career.”

Mr. Granville-Barker declared that the censorship checked the growth of original drama and he told the Committee that the Censor had been willing to pass his play *Waste* (which was frequently discussed during the proceedings) subject to modifications and alterations in certain lines containing outspoken references to sexual relations.

“I replied”, he said, “that I considered in such a play, sober, plain speaking to be the only honest course; that innuendo would be indecent.”

Colonel Lockwood “as a plain, blunt member of Parliament” asked Mr. Granville-Barker, “Do you think from your point of view, that it is a healthy thing for the public to be asked to judge of your advanced opinions in their individual capacity? Do you think that it is a wholesome thing for the drama that your advanced views should be put straight in front of the public without any further question?”

“Yes,” replied Mr. Granville-Barker. “I think there is nothing to be gained by treating the public as children.”

He told the Committee that in his management at the Court Theatre he had found an increasing difficulty as the season went on in getting plays of an advanced character and he put the blame for that on to the authors’ fears of the censorship.

Among other things Mr. Cecil Raleigh, the dramatist and author of many Drury Lane melodramas, declared, “What we call in slang a ‘blue’ play never pays. I speak to you from the vantage of

Drury Lane where we deal with very large numbers. . . . Virtue triumphant is my income absolutely."

"I wish the censorship to be done away with for every reason," he said. "It interferes with us commercially; it is an insult to our sense of decency, and an excuse for the manager's lack of determination; he cannot make up his own mind and he wants the Censor to help him; he cannot trust the author to produce a play for him."

"Your objection is largely sentimental?"

"I am a sentimentalist," answered Mr. Raleigh.

Sir Douglas Dawson, Comptroller of the Lord Chamberlain's department, gave the Committee some statistics as to the number of plays received and rejected by the Censor over a period of eight years. They were summarised thus:

1901	plays received	513	plays rejected	2
1902	"	"	519	"
1903	"	"	538	"
1904	"	"	468	"
1905	"	"	520	"
1906	"	"	579	"
1907	"	"	536	"
1908	"	"	560	"

Mr. J. M. Barrie said he was in favour of the abolition of the Censor and that he would be disposed to entrust local authorities with the duty of deciding whether or not improprieties were being committed. He considered that the censorship had evil effects on the British drama.

"I feel strongly", he declared, "that it makes our drama a more puerile thing in the life of the nation than it ought to be and is a stigma on all who write plays. . . . The better the drama—that is the more sincere, the more alive—the better for the public, and the drama must make most progress when it is untrammelled, and the work of authors anxious to say, whether sportively or seriously, what is in them to say, and allowed to do it. . . . To the official mind (this is what I feel strongly), whatever is not the accepted conventional view is a thing suspect. Officialdom is created to carry out the accepted view and so these authors are regarded as dark characters."

He added that he had never fallen foul of the censorship.

"I consider that an irresponsible censorship very heavily handicaps the drama, as compared with other branches of literature

and art," declared Mr. John Galsworthy. "I think it deters men of letters from writing for the stage."

He told the Committee that among other plays that had been censored in recent years were Shelley's *Cenci*, Ibsen's *Ghosts*, Maeterlinck's *Monna Vanna*, Brieux' *Maternité* and *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont*, Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, Granville-Barker's *Waste* and Garnett's *The Breaking Point*.

"These plays", he said, "have obviously not been censored for creating international complications; they have not been censored for blasphemous allusions; they have not been censored for objectionable personalities. They have therefore been censored for gross indecencies, and an institution which can thus characterise the work of Shelley, Ibsen, Maeterlinck, Brieux, Shaw, Barker and Garnett is an institution which inspires in men of letters the sort of feeling that I can only say would be inspired in a soldier if a brother officer had been accused of gross indecency without being given a chance of defending himself."

Among other things Mr. Galsworthy said: "The first-night audience of a play—especially in London—is an audience which is hardened—it cannot be shocked", and, "I regard the censorship as aiming at a crow but invariably bringing down a pigeon; it is not the protector of morality; it is the protector of 'prunes and prisms'."

Asked "Do you consider that the English drama has suffered in recent years from an oppressive censorship?" Sir Herbert Tree replied: "Well, there appears to be a kind of nervousness on the part of authors about writing plays with a serious purpose, sometimes. Sometimes it has been found that tragedies of the great passions have been tabooed and frivolous French farces have been favourably regarded. I think that is unsatisfactory."

THE EARL OF PLYMOUTH: May I venture to sum up what you have said about the censorship in this way—that in an ideal state of things you would prefer to see the drama entirely free?—Yes.

But, under the circumstances, human nature being what it is, you, on the whole, consider that a censor is necessary?—Yes.

Acting before the play is produced?—Yes, just as I prefer no doctors—to be so good in health that no doctor is needed.

"Personally", replied Sir Herbert to another question, "I have no great leanings towards the obstetric drama, but I believe many respectable ladies take a sheer joy in it."

"The average play that is always passed by the Censor is one

that corresponds to the average instincts of the ordinary man," said Mr. W. L. Courtney who at that time was dramatic critic of the *Daily Telegraph*. "He likes a certain level of moral maxim to which he is accustomed; he does not as a rule, like any serious study, or anything like a serious examination of moral points or social points, with which he is unfamiliar. The best hope, as it seems to me, for the English drama, is that a number of writers embarking on their duties in a serious spirit, should be free to write according to the best of their views and interests on subjects of permanent interest to society or the community, on questions which involve morals, on questions which involve social relations, and, above all—a familiar subject of the drama—the relations of the sexes.

"If you have an official who is overworked, very like, at all events sometimes, having to act in a hurry, he will always fall back on the conventional and refuse the original work. I should do it myself and I think most people would do it if pressed. At all events safety lies that way.

"But what I would venture to suggest is that the higher interests of the drama do not lie that way; that the higher interests, certainly of literature, do not tend that way; but, on the contrary, the higher interests of literature, and, as I venture to think, also the higher aspects of morality, require a great deal of freedom to be given to the adequate thinker, to the man who wishes to work at such subjects as interest him and he is competent to do so. . . . My experience for some ten or twelve years past has been that the general audience does not like indecency, and never has done so, that a frivolous play has never appealed to them, that, on the contrary, a risky play finds an instant condemnation from them."

Asked about objectionable plays that had been passed, Mr. Courtney said that he had certainly seen plays which should have been rejected, including *Dear Old Charlie*, "which I venture to say brought a blush to several cheeks, even of hardened ruffians like dramatic critics."

THE CHAIRMAN: You think that it does not matter if the drama has a deleterious effect on stalls and boxes?—I think they are much more able to look after themselves. It is wrong to bring a railing accusation, but I only put it in the most general way that I can when I say that I think the stalls and boxes have always favoured the lighter comedies, and that they do not care much about the deeper laws of life or of morality. I think that has been their attitude ever since the time of Charles II.

Mr. Courtney had something to say about the taste and judgment of the cultured educated few who occupied, as he put it, "the last row of the stalls and the first two rows of the pit."

COL. LOCKWOOD : From what class are they generally drawn, should you say ; from the middle class ?—Yes, they are very largely drawn from the middle class—very largely from shopkeepers and a large number of clerks. I do not know to what class they belong, except that they have a most extraordinary acquaintance with things theatrical and such memories.

And they really do not go to these lighter performances ?—I do not think they go for amusement.

Do you think they go to study the drama ?—I think they go because they are interested in the drama.

Sir William Schwenk Gilbert, of Savoy Opera fame, held that there should be a censor but that there should be an appeal from him to some officially appointed body and, he added, "I think that the stage of a theatre is not the proper pulpit from which to disseminate doctrines possibly of anarchism, of socialism, and of agnosticism ; and that it is not the proper platform upon which to discuss questions of adultery and free love, before a mixed audience composed of persons of all ages and both sexes, of all ways of thinking, of all conditions of life and various degrees of education."

Mr. A. B. Walkley, dramatic critic of *The Times* and the then President of the Society of Dramatic Critics, was of opinion that the censorship was justifiable.

He said there were two publics—the enlightened public who were interested in advanced ideas and the general public.

Mr. Robert Harcourt asked : "I understand in general terms that you think that the importance of the drama is very greatly exaggerated ; then you go on to say that the importance of all art in this country, is very greatly exaggerated."

"Yes," answered Mr. Walkley.

"Do you really think that is the case ?" asked Mr. Harcourt, "that the British nation are an excessively artistic nation ?"

"Indeed I do not," said Mr. Walkley, "but I think there is a great deal of exaggerated talk about it, inflated talk, a great deal of cant about it, and more now than ever before ; and partly that cant, that exaggerated way of talking about it, and partly the authors' own natural prepossessions in favour of art, have created a false standard and a false state of opinion."

"Do you feel any sense of humiliation in concerning yourself as a critic with this unimportant art?" asked Mr. Harcourt.

"No, one must live," was Mr. Walkley's reply.

Mr. George Alexander told the Committee that he was in favour of the censorship and that he should deprecate its abolition.

Mr. George Edwardes, the musical comedy impresario, said he considered the censorship was necessary. For twenty-five years he had had no trouble with it in the matter of his productions.

"I see you say that the main object of the theatre is to provide harmless entertainment, brightness, gaiety and amusement for the public," said Mr. Hugh Law.

"Yes," replied Mr. Edwardes.

"That is your view of the drama?"

"Yes."

"You do not think that it has any higher function than that?"

"No, I do not care about any higher function," was the candid reply.

"The plays that you produce are of such an innocent character that they would not raise a blush on the cheeks of young ladies from Peckham?" suggested Colonel Lockwood.

"That is so; that is my attempt."

Mr. A. E. W. Mason asked: "In your personal experience have you seen any signs of a readiness to interfere on the part of local authorities?"

"Yes," answered Mr. Edwardes, "in the case of a play called *The Merry Widow*, in Hull."

"What did they object to in *The Merry Widow*?"

"They said it was an improper play which never ought to have been produced—that it never ought to have been allowed to be produced."

"Who said so?"

"Some of the local newspapers came out with the most sensational articles, saying it was the most improper and immoral play that had ever been produced."

"The fact of having the Lord Chamberlain's licence was quite sufficient for me," was Mr. Edwardes's self-consoling remark.

Mr. Hall Caine, who claimed that the censorship had failed in its purpose, would not accept Mr. Edwardes's view of the theatre.

"If the theatre is to be given over to the 'light, bright, amusing' drama of Mr. George Edwardes, I, for one, shall buy a besom and

sweep a crossing rather than have anything more to do with it," he declared.

The veteran Sir Squire Bancroft firmly believed in the retention of the censorship. "Far from abolishing his office I should be of opinion that it would be advisable in the interests of the public and of the drama to strengthen rather than weaken his powers," he said.

Sir Arthur Pinero said he had no personal complaint to make regarding the censorship of his plays, but, he added, "I want to take my stand with the great majority of my fellow-dramatists in urging upon this Committee the view that the autocratic power of the Lord Chamberlain over the drama is opposed to the best interests of our art. In my opinion it degrades the dramatist by placing him under the summary jurisdiction otherwise unknown to English law, and it operates as a depressing influence on a body of artistes as fully alive to their responsibilities as any in the country."

He added: "I do not think that it has very seriously retarded the growth of the drama up to the present moment; but what I do say and what I think, is that we are now entering upon a period of new fertility and dignity and power and this development must be seriously impeded by the continuance of an irresponsible censorship."

Later on he told the Committee that he had never seen an indecent play on the English stage and he paid this charming compliment to Mr. Edwardes's productions: "I did not see the slightest harm in *The Spring Chicken* and I thought *The Merry Widow* a most delightful entertainment. I believe there are certain gentlemen who go about the world trying to find indecency, indelicacy and harm in books and plays and so on."

Mr. G. K. Chesterton was in a very entertaining vein when he appeared to give evidence "on behalf of the average man".

"I do not quite know why I am here," he announced, "but if anybody wants to know my views on the subject they are these: I am for the censorship but I am against the present Censor. I am very strongly for the censorship and I am very strongly against the present Censor. . . . I would trust twelve ordinary men, but I cannot trust an ordinary man."

With characteristic irrelevance he introduced in one of his arguments the name of George III "who was a pretty ordinary man in one sense."

"He gloried in the name of Briton?" suggested the Chairman.

"I know he did," answered Mr. Chesterton. "That is what showed him to be so thoroughly German."

"Do you regard with equanimity the prospect of a committee of a provincial town council determining whether a play, for example, *Monna Vanna*, should be performed or not?" he was asked.

"Yes, I am in favour of towns governing themselves," was his reply.

"How do you think that that would affect the theatrical business, looking at it from the point of view of the manager?"

"I have not the faintest idea. I have never looked at it from the point of view of the manager."

"You refuse to look at it from the point of view of the manager?"

"Certainly. I have already explained that I have no right here at all. If I represent anything I represent the gallery, but certainly not the manager. It is a horrible thought."

"There would be little for the gallery to enjoy if there were no managers to produce any plays," it was suggested.

"I do not know," replied Mr. Chesterton. "I think they would manage to have sports on the green."

The Bishop of Southwark thought there should be a censorship. "I think that the point about which censorship or control is needed is the point of decency," he said. "I should like to draw, I mean, a sharp distinction between decency and morality. In regard to morality I should not desire to interfere with the treatment quite free and bold of what may be called moral questions, moral themes, moral problems, moral arguments; and to that I should apply the principles of liberty."

Regarding *Waste*, the Bishop said: "I think there is rather an important distinction to be drawn between what is really indecent, and what is unsuitable for certain persons. I do not think that it would be at all desirable to try to limit the stage to plays that a man would naturally take his young daughter to see, just as there are some quite classical books, and books of very great value which he would not give to a young girl; but I should wish to guard myself very clearly in what I have said about indecency, against its being supposed that I want to limit plays to what everybody can see without being shocked or harmed. I think that the public must look after itself a good deal in these matters; but to represent that as meaning that it is desirable to have a number of theatres

playing to the grosser instincts in man or woman and therefore performing things which not only a girl ought not to see, but which nobody ought in the interests of public morality to see, is entirely I think to misrepresent."

Mr. John Snead-Cox, editor of the *Catholic Tablet*, who attended at the suggestion of the Archbishop of Westminster, said: "I think that almost unanimously Catholic opinion would be in favour of the retention of the censorship and that they would attach much more importance to the existence of the Censor than to any particular way in which he carried out his functions. They think that the existence of the censorship is a great barrier against indecency on the stage, and they think it would continue to be a barrier even if the Censor very rarely exercised his functions, just as a barrier of guns during a long war might defend a harbour without even firing a shot."

In his very forthright evidence Mr. Israel Zangwill, dramatist and critic, said the censorship served to protect indecency and to exclude ideas. He reminded the Committee that he had written a book entitled *Without Prejudice* in which he had said: "If I were State Censor of the English stage—which fortunately I am not—I should suppress half our plays for their indecency. The other half I should suppress for their fatuity."

Mr. Zangwill said he had been greatly annoyed by the evidence of Mr. Walkley "because it seems to me that Mr. Walkley considers nothing sacred except the dancing of Adeline Genée."

"Do I correctly understand you to suggest that there are a lot of plays passed by the Censor which are indecent?" asked Lord Gorell.

"I consider if you went round the English stage at the present moment", answered Mr. Zangwill, "you would find a great many vulgarities and improprieties, lowering as George Eliot said, 'the moral currency of the nation'."

"Would you stop them?" asked Lord Gorell.

"I would if I were Censor," replied Mr. Zangwill. "That shows the absurdity of having any particular individual as Censor."

When Mr. Zangwill declared that he would not take a daughter, if he had one, to almost any of the London theatres, Lord Newton said: "You must be more particular than most people."

"I am not particular," replied Mr. Zangwill. "There is a play now running in London with a character who follows 'Mrs.

Warren's profession' as the central figure and that is the most popular play in London."

"If we were to abolish the censorship do you not think we should be approximating to French ideas?" he was asked.

"Then so much for the hypocrisy of the British people if it is only by the censorship that they are prevented from being as bad as the French," he replied.

Mr. Zangwill added one other interesting view: "I should imagine that the music-hall in France is more improper than the music-hall in England, and that everything in France is more improper than everything in England."

* * *

The Committee issued its report on November 11, 1909. The full text of it occupied a closely set page of *The Times*. Never did a mountain in labour produce a smaller mouse.

Among other things the report recommended—

That the public interest required that theatrical performances should be regulated by special laws;

The Lord Chamberlain should remain the Licensor of Plays;

It should be optional to submit a play for licence, and legal to perform an unlicensed play, whether it had been submitted or not;

The Director of Public Prosecutions, if he is of opinion that any unlicensed play has been performed, is open to objection on the ground of indecency, should have power to prefer an indictment against the manager of the theatre where the play has been produced and against the author of the play;

The Office of the Examiner of Plays should be continued.

As one writer later commented: "When we consider that this report has not one word to say in favour of the Censor, but on the contrary explicitly states that his licence affords the public no security that the plays he approves are decent, and, moreover, states that authors of serious plays do need protection against this unenlightened despotism, we can only marvel at the ineptitude and timidity of its recommendations."

The Times made interesting comment on the unsatisfactory result of the inquiry. "We venture to think", it said, "that the proposals which it offers will not be generally approved; and that they will be classed with those compromises which solve no question and please nobody. The Committee were called together to decide whether the common complaints as to the existing condition of licensing plays; whether the censorship was necessary or not; if

it was, whether it should be in the hands of one man or a committee ; and whether in default of a central licenser of plays the local authorities should be invested with his power. . . . The Committee appeared to have thought that there was so much to be said on both sides that they have decided to recommend neither or both."

It added that the proper way to reform the censorship would be to make the Lord Chamberlain's responsibility more real by taking care to appoint to the office of Examiner the ablest man who could be induced to accept so thankless a task.

So the agitation ended. But though Mr. Redford subsequently gave way as Examiner to (of all men !) Charles Brookfield of *Dear Old Charlie* fame—a cynical appointment that really astonished the public—the result of the Committee's labours was perhaps not so unsatisfactory after all. The censorship developed leniency towards the advanced literary play and before many years had passed most of the plays banned at the time of the agitation were licensed.

XIX

“CHOKED WITH MUSICAL COMEDY”

“FOR THE MOMENT THE ENGLISH STAGE IS CHOKED WITH MUSICAL comedy. The public takes little interest in anything else. Ten years ago I had high hopes for a revival of the English drama. Indeed the battle seemed almost won. But to-day the English stage is sleepy and degraded. Seriousness meets with little response.”

So said Henry Arthur Jones in 1906 in one of those despairing tirades in which he wailed over the supposed decay of the British theatre. In another splenetic outburst he declared that all the British theatre-goer wanted was “legs and tomfoolery”.

Now in these attacks Mr. Jones was extremely ungenerous, unjust and inaccurate. He was ungenerous because he had no reason to complain that the public showed any lack of interest in his own contributions to the theatre. He was woefully exaggerating the state of affairs when he declared that the theatre was being “choked” with musical comedy. In 1906, the year in which he spoke, only ten plays which could be described as “musical comedy” were produced and these included productions which could more accurately be described as operetta or comic opera.

I have taken the trouble to make a careful reckoning and I find that during the whole of the Edwardian period—that is to say from January 1901 to May 1910—there were no more than ninety productions in the West End which could, by any stretch of the imagination, be classed as musical comedy. In making this calculation I have included many productions of a superior kind which would more accurately be described as operetta and comic opera. This total—a really small proportion of the plays produced—could hardly be said to have “choked” the British stage.

It is not to be denied, of course, that musical comedy was a very popular attraction, not only in London but in the provinces in those carefree, happy days when income-tax was some modest trifle in the £ and there was hardly a cloud upon the horizon. But it was by no means the only kind of light entertainment. Even Mr. Jones himself administered to the need for laughter.

What did he mean by ‘‘legs and tomfoolery’’? Here was injustice and inaccuracy.

Tomfoolery, I presume, was his way of describing the jests and japes of what, on the whole, was an exceedingly clever band of comedians. ‘‘Dost think because thou art virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale?’’ Since when had the playgoer in his hour of leisure ceased to have the right to enjoy light humour, frivolity and pleasant nonsense? I have never discovered what Mr. Jones thought of Shakespeare’s clowns, nor whether he would have described their antics, their puns and wordplay as mere tomfoolery. He could have found buffoonery even in Shaw. When I come to think of it, how many of Mr. Jones’s comedies were really on a higher intellectual plane or were of greater moral value than some of the better musical entertainments of his time?

And as for those ‘‘legs’’. Mr. Jones was here not only inaccurate, he was behind the times. For all I know to the contrary, Gilbert and Sullivan’s operettas may have shared his ungenerous scorn of musical entertainment but, as everyone knows, the Savoy entertainments, however delightful and amusing and appealing to the eye as well as to the ear, were extremely decorous as to dress. And as much may be said by any unprejudiced person for the musical comedy of the kind that was seen at the Gaiety, at Daly’s or any other theatre that staged such attractions, a relaxation, which, by the way, that high-minded philosopher Herbert Spencer very much enjoyed.

The ladies who adorned Edwardian musical comedy were as fair a band of beauty as ever playgoer could desire, but though they danced and exhibited exceptional allurements they did not gratify the eye with much show of leg. Indeed, as you can see by the illustrated magazines of the time, they were always elaborately frocked and gowned, in fashions which we should now regard as voluminous in the extreme. Mr. Jones in his wrath must have been thinking of his youth when old-time ‘‘burlesque’’ prevailed. Here, indeed, it was the custom to display the feminine form in tights. In fact burlesque was very much akin to pantomime, though the fashions were more decorous than in the pantomime of to-day.

Burlesque, which had had a long run of popularity, was dead some years before the beginning of the new century; it had been ousted completely by musical comedy, a much more discreet and respectable thing. For that, George Edwardes was responsible;

he was the acknowledged originator of musical comedy, a class of entertainment peculiar to the English-speaking people, quite different in style from burlesque as it was as from German and Viennese operetta or the French *opéra bouffe* of the Offenbachian kind. Its emphasis was upon girls, comedians and ear-tickling tunes, not upon legs.

Throughout his career Edwardes was associated with musical entertainment in all its changes and developments. I doubt if he was ever much interested in any other kind of stage presentation. In his own sphere he was supreme. Though he sometimes made mistakes of judgment he had a remarkable sense of the public taste as well as a curious ability in looking ahead and anticipating its wishes and in divining when the public had had enough of a particular brand of show. He was a great character, a notable Edwardian, about whom there are scores of stories, many apocryphal, no doubt, but all reflecting with more or less truth the particular oddities of taste and temperament of an engaging personality.

The only thing in the way of biography of this remarkable man that I have seen was a ridiculous film some years ago in which he was depicted as a lithe and dashing *jeune premier* of abounding lightness and inanity. Whereas the real George, at the height of his career, was a handsome, portly fellow with a sweeping moustache, a high-pitched drawling voice and a manner in which there was a certain persuasive charm. His somewhat careless and indolent manner concealed a shrewd mind, a strong will and a very astute judgment.

In the theatre as on the turf he was a gambler. Romano's, the "Pink 'Un", the Derby—these things are conjured up by his very portrait. He certainly made his stamp upon his time. Even now his name stands for a very definite species of entertainment—joyous, florid, tuneful, irresponsible, yet not without a measure of taste.

His productions entertained a vast body of the public, not over critical, perhaps, who sought only relaxation and beguilement in the theatre. Such playgoers were content as long as they had pretty faces, pretty dresses, pretty tunes and plenty of amusing antics, all served up amid handsome scenery. Whether at the Gaiety, at Daly's, the Prince of Wales's or at other theatres, he always gave the public the best that could be provided. He was exceptionally lucky in finding comedians, lovely leading ladies and composers of

a kind whose equal in furnishing pleasing and catchy melodies, I consider, is not to be found in these times. He was not always so fortunate, perhaps, in finding suitable lyrists and writers of “books”.

Edwardes had been manager for D’Oyly Carte at the Savoy. In 1885 he joined John Hollingshead at the old Gaiety which stood a little westwards of the later theatre on the same side of the Strand. From the exterior it was not a very imposing or gay-looking structure. The Strand entrance was very narrow; the rest of the façade was that of the Gaiety Restaurant, a rather hideous structure designed somewhat on the lines of a Nonconformist place of worship, with the addition of a portico and a great show of lamps.

Edwardes succeeded old Hollingshead in 1886 but he did not keep “the sacred lamp of burlesque” alight for very long. He saw that the old type of show for which the theatre had been famous for many years was played out. What was wanted was some newer kind of entertainment, something with a modern theme and with a younger and prettier type of chorus girl than that which had adorned burlesque. *In Town*, which he produced at the Prince of Wales’s in 1892, was a sort of *ballon d’essai*. It was described as “musical farce” and was written by Adrian Ross and J. T. Tanner, with music by Dr. Osmond Carr. It was a success and so was *A Gaiety Girl* which followed, written by Owen Hall, with music by Sidney Jones (composer of *The Geisha*). It was billed as “a musical comedy”. So musical comedy was launched, and in 1894 *The Shop Girl* was the first of a long succession of Gaiety pieces so many of which bore “girl” in the title.

In 1895 Edwardes took over the control of Daly’s Theatre, and his first musical play there—apart from a Christmas production of *Hansel and Gretel*—was *An Artist’s Model* which had such artistes as Marie Tempest, Hayden Coffin, Maurice Farkoa, Lottie Venne, Farren Soutar and Lettie Lind. It had a long run, just as did so many of his productions at this theatre which, during the Edwardian time, included *A Country Girl* (1902), *The Cingalee* (1904), *The Little Michus* (1905), *Les Merveilleuses* (1906), *The Merry Widow* (1907) and *The Dollar Princess* (1909).

Edwardes was always careful to preserve a distinction between the types of entertainment at the Gaiety and at Daly’s. The Daly’s productions were nearer to genuine operetta, showing less robust humour, a more refined type of music, a closer attention to plot;

whereas in the Gaiety productions the plot was always more sketchy and on more conventional lines, with a greater opportunity for the principals, more particularly the comedians, to display themselves in numbers irrelevant to whatever plot could be discerned. Taking a general view of their nature it can be said that there would be a general assembly of the company in the first act and after that everybody would be transported to Monte Carlo or some such resort of merrymaking that lent itself to picturesque scenery and the diverting actions of the comedians.

The plays were subtly designed for their respective theatres. It is unimaginable that a Daly's show would have succeeded at the Gaiety or *vice versa*. It is unimaginable that Marie Tempest would have fitted into (or would have consented to appear in) a Gaiety musical comedy, but she was an excellent star at Daly's before she deserted to the comedy stage.

In the manner of presentation at the Gaiety, George Edwardes had learnt a good deal from *The Belle of New York*, in 1898. This American show caused something like a sensation because of its effervescent liveliness and constant movement. The Gaiety chorus girls had hitherto provided a sedate accompaniment to the principals. Their attitude was mainly one of ladylike aloofness, statuesque disdain and reserve, but after the successful example of *The Belle* they took a far more active part in the stage business and altogether the spirit was pepped up.

The Toreador (June 1901) was Edwardes's last production at the old Gaiety Theatre. This lively show with a Spanish background had a cast that included many of the artistes who so long formed the established ensemble of Gaiety favourites, for it included Marie Studholme, Gertie Millar, Claire Romaine, Queenie Leighton, Violet Lloyd, Maidie Hope, Sybil Arundale and Kitty Mason in the way of beauty as well as Edmund Payne, George Grossmith, jnr., Lionel Mackinder, Fred Wright, jnr., Robert Nainby, Harry Grattan and Herbert Clayton.

A dazzling array this, and I cannot make up my mind which give me the greater delight to recall—the beauty and charm of those lovely ladies or the fun of its comedians.

Though a boy at the time I remember so well that partnership between Grossmith, always the dude of such sartorial exquisiteness, and Edmund Payne as Sammy Gigg, a "tiger" whose lot it was to be called upon to take part in a bullfight. They had many duets, of course, as they always had in Gaiety shows.

Grossmith was decidedly the lesser comedian but he was a superb and ideal foil to ‘‘Teddy’’ Payne, a droll of genius if you like and one of the most diverting ever to adorn musical comedy. He was diminutive and always endearing with his air of perpetual surprise and wonderment, his engaging lisp, his antic little legs and in every feature from wide mouth and straight-cut fringe and tousled hair—a familiar make-up from which he rarely departed. He was so good in those ‘‘illustrative’’ numbers which were generally a feature of Gaiety shows. Sometimes in partnership with Katie Seymour, sometimes with Gertie Millar, sometimes with ample, buxom, good-natured Connie Ediss or with Grossmith, he would introduce these little sketches of varying types and characters—the bus-driver, a patient patron of a teashop, for instance, all so characteristic of his peculiarly humorous talent.

Lionel Mackinder (husband of that delightful comedienne, Gracie Leigh, and one of the first actors to be killed during the 1914 war) was one of the best ‘‘straw hat’’ light comedians I have ever seen. Nainby was long famous for his minor roles in Gaiety shows. He nearly always expressed himself in broken English, even when he was supposed to be a Frenchman or a German among other French or German people. Playgoers whose experience goes back to the Gaiety as it used to be will never forget these grand artistes.

But then there were those lovely ladies, the Gaiety girls. It was a golden age for stage beauty, and the astute Edwardes, who had an unerring taste that way and a talent for spotting them, gathered the cream of them under his banner.

Was there ever a lovelier example of fair English womanhood than gracious Marie Studholme? Or such piquant dainty prettiness as that of petite Gabrielle Ray? Maidie Hope, Rosie Boote (later the Marchioness of Headfort), Jean Aylwin, Ethel Sydney, Kitty Gordon—but the list is far too long to quote, particularly if one also takes into reckoning the artistes engaged in other musical plays of the time—among them Lily Elsie, Phyllis and Zena Dare, Ellaline Terriss, Pauline Chase, Billie Burke, Kate Cutler, Isabel Jay, Phyllis le Grand and no end of others.

No wonder that the picture-postcard business was at the height of its sales in the early days of the century. They sold in hundreds of thousands, those glossy, fully dental photographs of stage favourites. Everyone seemed to collect them, the prime favourites being those of Marie Studholme, the Dare sisters and Gabrielle Ray.

No wonder, too, that the stage-door was the haunt of Guards officers, and the *jeunesse dorée*, or that the peerage robbed George Edwardes of so many of his enchanting beauties. With such infatuated patrons musical comedy was sure of its well-paying audiences. It is said that admirers of this kind were often good for a stall at every performance throughout the run. For all that, most of the productions at Daly's, if not at the Gaiety, showed a loss but such losses were made up by touring business, not only in the provinces, where companies were sent out in duplicate and often in triplicate by Edwardes's own companies, but by such managements as Morell and Mouillot and George Dance. In addition to this Edwardes sent companies on tour in South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

But I have digressed from *The Toreador*, the chief feature of which was that it introduced Gertie Millar as Cora Bellamy, one of the bridesmaids who sang so bewitchingly

Keep off the grass
Keep off the grass,
Conduct like this I won't pardon.
Play at your ease,
But if you please
Keep off the grass in the garden.

After that Miss Millar remained with the Gaiety company for seven years and became its prime favourite with a popularity rarely excelled by any musical comedy star. She was indeed the very embodiment of the Gaiety girl and everybody's darling from stallholder to worshipping galleryite. She was accomplished in everything that musical comedy demanded. Hers was not perhaps the conventional standard of beauty but there was real charm in the saucy tilt of her nose, in the buoyancy with which she took the stage, and the air of joyous delight and good nature with which she entered into the fun and frolic of the business. She sang with unerring point in the sweetest of voices and her dancing—an effortless movement of airy and undulating grace—was sheer delight.

The Toreador ran for 675 performances which, up to that time, was a record for the Gaiety. Gertie Millar was the leading lady when the new Gaiety Theatre was opened on June 26, 1903 with *The Orchid*, a notable occasion for it was attended by the King and Queen and it marked the inauguration of a

theatre which was an architectural adornment to the Strand improvements.

The cast was familiar and there was an audacious touch among the characters, for Harry Grattan was made up in the exact likeness of Joseph Chamberlain, complete with frock coat, orchid and monocle. The hit of the show was made by Gertie Millar who, in parody of Barrie's current play sang :

Mary, Mary, dainty as a fairy
She's a fickle but a fascinating fairy.
And my uncle with a sigh
Says he'll live for her or die
He's so fond of little Mary.

The Spring Chicken, which came in 1905, caused something of a stir because, founded upon the French play *Le Coquin de Printemps* and dealing frivolously with the subject of marital infidelity, it was deemed to be disreputable. At least that was the opinion of that crusading and enterprising journalist W. T. Stead who, having shunned the theatre all his life as an evil thing, had at last become a playgoer. He attacked the play but did no more than give Mr. Edwardes an excellent advertisement. What I most recall of it is that it was saucy and that the character played by George Grossmith—that of a French lawyer with periodically flirtatious outbursts—was not in the best of taste. The character was named Babori—an obvious allusion to Maître Labori, the barrister who defended Dreyfus. And to emphasise matters Grossmith, with a golden beard and a straight-cut fringe, was made up very much in his resemblance. But the comedy was very funny and the score by Ivan Caryll and Lionel Monckton was one of their best.

There was a delicious number in “Oh, so gently”; Gertie Millar had never been so demure and roguish as when she sang “I've come along to Paris for a change”; Connie Ediss as an English mother-in-law sang with maximum point and gusto a risky song which had the refrain “I don't know but I guess”, and Edmund Payne had rarely had a more amusing part than his impersonation of an English *père de famille*.

The Spring Chicken had the very respectable run of 401 performances, yet before it had ended there had been rumours that “the sacred lamp of burlesque” was to be rekindled and that George Edwardes would rekindle it.

Musical comedy had presented a laughing face upon the world

'Tocracy of universal man!
No more smoky, oh
Don't you realise?
Bright as Tokio
Of our sea allies!
Let us be allies
And we'll crown
And idealise
London town.

But after that everything dwindled into not very good musical comedy and the only artiste who gained much credit out of an unfortunate production was that melancholy comedian Alfred Lester who was a lost policeman.

After that George Edwardes reverted to plain musical comedy. This time it was *The Girls of Gottenberg*, produced on May 15, 1907. Gaiety shows had often been inspired by topical events as, for instance, *The Messenger Boy*, which had its origin in the famous cross-Atlantic dash of the messenger boy Jagers. This time the ridiculous imposture of the cobbler of Koepenick, who had fooled the Kaiser's officers with masquerade as an important envoy, was seized upon by George Grossmith and L. E. Berman and turned into a very gay show with a German setting and a capital score by Caryl and Monckton. Edmund Payne was very droll as the masquerader, Gertie Millar looked stunning in military uniform, George Grossmith as an inane and much-petted officer sang the well-remembered "Otto of Roses", and the play was such a success that it was revived at the Adelphi in the following year.

For all that, there was a departure from Gaiety style in *Havana* which succeeded it on April 25, 1908. The book was by George Grossmith and Graham Hill and the music was by Leslie Stuart who displayed little of the musical facility shown in *Florodora*. Moreover, the old Gaiety combination was no longer there for W. H. Berry and Alfred Lester were the principal comedians. It was Berry's first appearance at the Gaiety. A few years previously Edwardes had discovered this admirable comedian in a concert party at Broadstairs and had put him under contract. He had already figured as Nisch in *The Merry Widow* and he was a notable addition to musical comedy talent. Nobody could be so amusing with stage "props" as he, and few could give such point and humour to a topical number with endless verses. He had a splendid

singing voice and an appearance of great geniality. But something was missing from *Havana*.

It was a delightful surprise, therefore, when the Gaiety reverted to its old formula on January 23, 1909 with *Our Miss Gibbs* and with its recognised company of favourites. This was not only one of the Gaiety's best productions but I can solemnly declare that it was just about the best English musical comedy of its kind ever produced. Written by "Cryptos", "constructed" by J. T. Tanner and with music by Caryl and Monckton, it was a feast of good fun and catchy melody. One of its scenes was the White City, then a prime attraction in London. I shall never forget how amusing Edmund Payne was as a raw Yorkshire lad up in London to take part in the brass band contest and to meet his Yorkshire cousin Mary Gibbs, a shop girl who could give authentic tongue to the northern accent, for Gertie Millar was a Bradford girl and proud of it. Clad in an incredible reach-me-down suit of alarming pattern and clutching an oversized bombardon, Payne was a ludicrous sight and his songs were just as diverting.

But what one remembers with the greatest delight of the last of the real Gaiety musical comedies is of Gertie Millar who had never shone with such enchanting brightness. The felicity of her presence on the stage reached its peak when, in Pierrot dress, she sang to Monckton's haunting melody :

I'm such a silly when the moon comes out,
I hardly know what I'm about,
Skipping, hopping,
Never never stopping, I can't keep still although I try.
I'm all a-quiver when the moonbeams glance,
That is the moment when I long to dance ;
I can never close a sleepy eye
When the moon comes creeping up the sky.

The song was entitled "Moonstruck" and never was there a more exquisite embodiment of midsummer madness as she skipped—no, rather floated, darted and skimmed—round the stage in her joyous, antic excess of high spirits.

Our Miss Gibbs ran for 636 performances, a record for the Gaiety but, alas ! that was the last of the typical Gaiety musical comedies. The team broke and its members dispersed into other shows and so a light went out at the Gaiety, never to be rekindled with the same brightness.

I have frequently mentioned the name of Lionel Monckton who

wrote all that was best of so many Gaiety scores, although Belgian-born, majestically bearded Ivan Caryll who conducted at the theatre, had a neat hand in turning out a pretty tune. But Monckton, a man of taste and culture who had been a music critic on the staff of the *Daily Telegraph*, was a real musician who turned out an almost unceasing stream of enchanting melodies, so many of which were sung by Gertie Millar whom he married.¹

Let me recall what H. A. Scott, the very able music critic of the *Westminster Gazette* wrote about him on the occasion of a new production :

“No one knows better than Mr. Monckton what is needed by the public in works of this order though few possess the knack of supplying it with such unfailing skill. It is not the least of Mr. Monckton’s merits that he never attempts more than he can accomplish. Disregarding that maxim of Browning that a man’s reach should exceed his grasp he strives after nothing beyond his power and thereby achieves success where mere ambitious efforts might fail. There is an amount of ease and spontaneity about his work which many a bigger composer might envy. If he is never aggressively original, he is always graceful, refined and satisfying to the ear. The least cultivated can enjoy, while the most fastidious need never despise, his art and to write music of which this may be said implies no light accomplishment.”

There were several others in the same field, many of them highly accomplished musicians. Sir Edward German stands apart as a composer of light opera and as near a successor to Sir Arthur Sullivan as could be imagined. It is only just to mention him, however, as he took a notable part in raising the standard of music on the lighter stage during the Edwardian period.

Sidney Jones was a composer of genuine merit and fertility of invention with never a trace of the commonplace. He supplied the scores of several of Edwardes’s productions though they would be more rightly classed as operetta than musical comedy. *The Geisha* is the best example of its kind that we can boast ; its sparkling melodies and its concerted numbers sound as fresh and enchanting to-day as when the Japanese operetta was first produced at Daly’s in 1896. Nothing that he wrote in later years approached it but there were delightful scores to *My Lady Molly* (Terry’s, 1903) and *See See* (Prince of Wales’s, 1906). If there was such an institution in London as a repertory home of operetta *The Geisha* would surely be at the

¹ She later married the Earl of Dudley.

top of the list. On the Continent, notably in Germany and Italy, it has maintained an honoured place among operettas frequently performed. We neglect it.

Leslie Stuart (whose best work was in *Florodora*) was much ahead of other competitors but excellent work was done by Howard Talbot, Frank Tours, H. E. Haines and by Paul Rubens who anticipated Ivor Novello and Noël Coward by writing the "books" and lyrics to his own scores. He modestly described them as "tunes" and "jingles". And very charming were his one-man shows. The pity of it was that he died so young and before he had realised the best of his musical capabilities.

The unfortunate writers of lyrics and *libretti* rarely got a look in unless someone had to select a scapegoat for what was lacking in the production. But Edwardes employed several by no means unaccomplished writers for his requirements. The pseudonymous Adrian Ross, who had a hand in so many Gaiety productions, was really Arthur Reed Ropes, a classical scholar and a Cambridge don who had written considerable poetry. Some of his lyrics—I particularly remember the witty "Penelope—Menelope—I don't remember which" in *A Greek Slave*—was considered worthy to adorn a very select anthology of humorous verse. Percy Greenbank, too, was a neat writer, and if Owen Hall was not as consistently witty as he might have been he was at least industrious and inventive in a very difficult art. His real name was James ("Jimmy") Davies and he came of literary stock. "Frank Danby", the once popular novelist being a sister, and Gilbert Frankau, one of his nephews. His habits were romantically spendthrift and impecunious—hence the punning pen-name which should be read as "owing all".

XX

MORE MUSICAL COMEDY

THE INVASION BY AMERICAN MUSICAL COMEDY THAT HAD begun so sensationally with *The Belle of New York* was continued in 1901 with *The Belle of Bohemia* (music by Ludwig Engländer) with which the newly erected Apollo Theatre was opened on February 21; then with *The Girl From Up There* (music by Gustav Kerker, composer of *The Belle* music), *The Whirl of the Town* (also by Kerker) and then *The Fortune Teller*, all within the same year. None of these was a particular success, though *The Fortune Teller* deserved to be because its music was by Victor Herbert, the Dublin-born American composer who wrote the best light opera music that his adopted country has ever produced. Incidentally it was not until *In Dahomey* with a coloured company appeared at the Shaftesbury Theatre in 1903 that another American production was presented.

When one surveys the total production of musical plays during the Edwardian period a constant endeavour to raise the artistic standard is very noticeable. Indeed at one time there did seem good ground for hoping that a new school of British comic opera was coming into being and that there were composers and librettists who might be able to replace what we had lost in the partnership of Gilbert and Sullivan. Captain Basil Hood was a most promising librettist and in Edward German there was a composer who wrote melodies and concerted numbers in the pure English idiom that was the nearest possible approach to Sullivan.

It was German who added to the uncompleted score of Sullivan's last opera *The Emerald Isle* which was produced at the Savoy in April 1901. In the following year came *Merrie England*, the best of all German's own compositions for the stage and one of the most successful pieces of its kind ever written. The original cast included Robert Evett, Henry Lytton, Agnes Fraser, Louie Pounds, Rosina Brandram and Walter Passmore—true Savoyards all. In 1903 it was followed by *A Princess of Kensington* which was made memorable

because it contained a quartette of sailors who, in true Sullivanesque vein, sang :

We ain't like them jolly tars you see in a play
 A-rescuing 'eroines and shouting "Belay!"
 Of which them there's burlesquesses of what sailors be
 Such as Bill Blake, Will Weatherly, Jem Johnson and me.

Such other productions as Ivan Caryl's *The Duchess of Danzig* (Lyric, 1903); Liza Lehmann's *Sergeant Brue* (Strand, 1904) and *The Vicar of Wakefield* (Prince of Wales's, 1906); Sidney Jones's *My Lady Molly* (Terry's, 1903) and Edward German's *Tom Jones* (Apollo, 1907) were all in the vein of light opera, with singers of recognised standing in the casts.

In *The Duchess of Danzig*, Caryl attempted rather more than he was capable of achieving in the way of writing music good enough for comic opera and it may be interesting to quote what H. A. Scott had to say on that subject when he reviewed the piece in the *Westminster Gazette* because it establishes a point I wish to make.

"*The Duchess of Danzig*", he wrote, "may be regarded as a step in the right direction—namely, in the direction of legitimate light opera as opposed to the nondescript and amorphous productions with which we have lately been so familiar. One might indeed make too much of this distinction, for the difference between a good musical comedy of the Gaiety type and the average comic opera, either ancient or modern, is not in truth a matter of very great moment. The unities and the verities and the probabilities are often as not hardly less regarded in the one case than in the other, while neither possesses as a rule any higher claim to existence than the fact that it serves to pass an idle hour.

"There have been many pieces of the Gaiety type whose incidents have been quite as plausible and coherent as those of the average comic opera, properly so called, while if greater licence has sometimes been claimed by them in that respect, they have usually been the more amusing on this account; and since the only aim of such productions is to please who shall say that the end has not thereby been justified by the means? Wherefore a trifle more extravagance and licence in their incidents and plot is really a matter of comparatively small account so long as they fulfil their essential purpose. One might as well demand absolute fidelity to nature in a caricature as perfect verisimilitude in a comic opera or in musical comedy, and it is often rather amusing to notice the exaggerated



H. G. PELISSIER of The Follies.



CAMILLE CLIFFORD in *The Belle of Mayfair*, Vaudeville Theatre, 1906.



BERTRAM WALLIS in *The King of Cadonia*, Prince of Wales's Theatre, 1909.



LILY ELSIE as Sonia in *The Merry Widow*, Daly's Theatre, 1907.



HUNTLEY WRIGHT in *A Country Girl*, Daly's Theatre, 1902.



SYBIL ARUNDALE, HAYDEN COFFIN and ISABEL JAY in *The Cingalee*, Daly's Theatre, 1904.



LILY ELSIE and JOSEPH COYNE in *The Merry Widow*, Daly's Theatre, 1907.



GEORGE GRAVES as Baron Popoff in *The Merry Widow*.

importance sometimes attached to this point on purely academic grounds when entertainment of this description is under consideration."

The courageous attempt to establish a school of British comic or light opera came to a standstill after this. The musical stage of London was about to extend its encouragement to foreign importations.

George Edwardes had followed *The Country Girl* at Daly's with the equally successful and tuneful *The Cingalee* in which Huntley Wright played a Baboo with comically distorted English idiom in a company that included Hayden Coffin, Gracie Leigh, Rutland Barrington, Isabel Jay and Sybil Arundale. But, never content to stand still, he was always on the look out for something new. A French company had performed André Messager's enchanting operetta, *Veronique*, at the Coronet Theatre, Notting Hill, which in those days was notable for its visits from foreign companies.

On May 18, 1904 Edwardes produced it in an English adaptation at the Apollo, with Ruth Vincent—a picture of muslined innocence and light-hearted gaiety—Rosina Brandram and Lawrence Rea, and with George Graves and Fred Emney to supply more plentiful and broader comedy than had been seen in the original version. Concerning the music H. A. Scott wrote: "*Veronique* is genuine *opéra comique*, not musical farce and judged as such must certainly be pronounced a very successful example of its class. . . . M. Messager has set it to music which is consistently gay and bright. What is particularly noticeable about M. Messager's sparkling music is its ease and spontaneity. Nothing is forced or laboured. All is easy, natural and straightforward so that the whole work falls most pleasantly on the ear."

The romantic charm of the story, its melodious score and the drollery of Graves made it an outstanding success. Thus it was that a temporary vogue of French operetta began at Daly's, for on April 29, 1905 Messager's *The Little Michus* was produced, with a cast including Willie Edouin, Robert Evett, Louis Bradfield, Huntley Wright, Adrienne Augarde and Mabel Green. Later on George Graves took over from Edouin, and my pleasantest memory of the production, apart from the charm of its music—inferior though it was to that of *Veronique*—is of the drollery of Graves as the bulbous-nosed General des Îles and the nonsense of his business in the shop of the Michus.

It was hoped that the success of these plays would encourage

the production of similar examples of French operetta but expectations were disappointed. *The Little Michus* was succeeded by *Les Merveilleuses*, the title of which was altogether too much for the London playgoers' capabilities of pronounciation, so it had to be altered to *The Lady Dandies*. Even then it did not enjoy great success though it had a score of delicate refinement by Dr. Hugo Felix and a book based upon a Sardou comedy by Basil Hood, with lyrics by Adrian Ross. It was lavishly mounted in the Directoire period and offered superb spectacle. Critics glowed about the scholarly score of Felix and the beauty with which it was sung. The cast included Robert Evett, Fred Emney, Denise Orme, Elizabeth Firth, Evie Greene and W. H. Berry who introduced Cockneyfied gags and topicalities into the period.

After that Edwardes had to look for something new again. The success of an operetta entitled *Die Lustige Witwe*, written by an ex-army bandmaster named Franz Lehar, had been reported to him from Vienna but at first he rejected the idea of importing it. It was one of the mistakes of this usually shrewd impresario who had once turned down the offer of *The Belle of New York* which he might have acquired lock, stock and barrel for £300. At last, however, he was persuaded to send Pat Malone, one of his lieutenants, to Vienna to report upon it. He returned full of enthusiasm and Edwardes promptly secured the London rights for £1,000 on behalf of the Gaiety Syndicate, despite the assurance that it was more suitable for Daly's Theatre. Some trouble arose, however, and it was decided to produce it at Daly's—a wise decision. I do not imagine that it would have had the same success at the Gaiety, despite its great merits. It was nearer to operetta than the Gaiety had ever approached.

Edwardes had made it a condition of the deal that the creator of the role of Sonia (the merry widow), Mitzi Miller, should be included in the London cast. She had a lovely voice but, as was the habit among the heroines of German operetta in those days, she was buxom and without the allure of which London was likely to approve. Edwardes did not approve and someone else had to be found for the part. Yorkshire-born, Lancashire-bred, Lily Elsie, who had been making her name in London—notably in *The New Aladdin*—was suggested as a substitute but Edwardes had his doubts. Fortunately he overcame his misgivings. He engaged George Graves for the comedy role of Baron Popoff and W. H. Berry for the supporting part of Nisch. Then came the trouble of the

casting of the wayward hero Prince Danilo which on the Continent had been a romantic singing role. Joseph Coyne had charm enough but he couldn't sing a note; a comical croak was as much as he could manage. He had his own doubts about the part, too, for he regarded himself as a funny man, not as a romantic lover. It was therefore arranged that his numbers should be transferred to other roles.

Little wonder that Franz Lehar had his misgivings when he came to London for the rehearsals. He was dismayed by his non-singing hero and by the amount of comedy that had been introduced. He complained that it was ruining his "beautiful operetta". I can judge what his astonishment must have been. In my continental wanderings I have seen the original versions of many Viennese operettas which have been produced in London and have been surprised at the amount of comedy which we have thought fit to add. Continental playgoers are content with very little of that element, relishing romance and melody for its own sake, but it has always seemed to be an indispensable requirement in a London production. Hence the failure of so many Viennese successes on our stage when the comedy has been poor. It was certainly not poor in *The Merry Widow*. Graves with his gags and his elaborately worked-up discourse on "Hetty the Hen"—that must have puzzled Lehar—made his grotesque Baron Popoff the part of a lifetime. And it helped to make *The Merry Widow* an overwhelming success in London.

It had a remarkably good press. *The Times* critic, for instance, wrote: "The fame of *Die Lustige Witwe* must have preceded the coming of the opera for the appearance of the composer was greeted with thunders of applause before ever a note had been heard. The applause seemed to increase in volume as the evening went on; we have hardly ever attended so uproarious a first night; and the waltz-tune was caught up at once and whistled incessantly between the second and third acts. The charm of that waltz lies (as the whistling proved) not so much in its air as in its harmonisation, and still more in the strange and almost entirely beautiful dance executed to it by Miss Lily Elsie, with the help of Mr. Joseph Coyne . . . *The Merry Widow* . . . is genuine light opera; it is not overlaid yet by buffoonery; it is strong enough to carry the display and the glare in which the English public is supposed to delight; it has a good story to tell and tells it pleasantly; and the music has this at least in its favour, that we should like to hear it again. It is not blatant nor sugary, nor cheap; its content is not exhausted

at first hearing (except in the case of the waltz) and it gains by a certain reticence that invites further attention."

Praising the players the critic continued: "Miss Elsie is not *lustige*; she could not be. Gently appealing, charming, a little strange and remote, she is everything delightful—except 'merry'. The quintessence of her came in that dreamy, swaying waltz. . . ." And he finished by describing *The Merry Widow* as "the most satisfying individual piece of lyric work that has appeared on our lyric stage for some time."

The rest, you may say, is history. Produced on June 8, 1907 it ran for 778 performances, up to that time a record for Daly's. The music captivated the public. The waltz and the "Vilja" song were whistled everywhere and women wore "merry widow" hats in imitation of the cartwheel fashion introduced by lovely Lily Elsie. She was enchanting—such a voice and bearing for romance, such allure, such bedazzlement. It was a great personal triumph and made her the ruling woman star. I have seen many "merry widows" but none to compare with her.

During the run at Daly's, which did not end until July 31, 1909, the part was played on different occasions by Constance Drever, Clara Evelyn, Gertrude Glyn and by the German artiste Emmy Wehlen, but Lily Elsie returned to the cast and was the last to see it through. During its run *The Merry Widow* drew nearly £250,000 to the box-office.

Nothing could have been more expressive of the mood of the times than *The Merry Widow* with its gay inconsequence and its reflection of an easygoing world of wealth and luxury and exotic titles. The little Balkan kingdoms, their princelings and their Court intrigues and royal romances, were always in the news in those days and were a subject that one could joke about and sing about. And how well Lehar with his exhilarating waltz rhythms and his gift for lightly sensuous, insinuating melody, could express the mood. He was the most notable waltz composer that had arisen since Johann Strauss and the best writer of Viennese operetta, too, though Vienna and Berlin and Budapest produced an ample supply of rivals at the time.

The Merry Widow set the vogue for Viennese melody that was destined to last until the First World War put a sudden end to the importation of Central European musical entertainment. So the door was open to romantic gallantry and sentiment, to crystal candelabra, to the glitter and pomp of princely salons, to elegant

military uniforms, to the loves and caprices of beautiful princesses and handsome princes, all to the lilt of the swooning waltz.

Edwardes's next Viennese production was Oscar Straus's *A Waltz Dream*, a charming operetta full of delicious melodies, which he presented at the Hicks (later Globe) Theatre in March 1908, with Gertie Millar as Mitzi and Robert Evett as the fickle but mellifluous hero. *The Merry Widow* was succeeded at Daly's in September 1909 by Leo Fall's *The Dollar Princess*, a production which underwent considerable changes in cast in its preliminary provincial tour. Lily Elsie was the heroine in this tuneful production, with W. H. Berry as its principal comedian.

All the time, of course, musical comedy of the conventional type had been pursuing its way. One can go back to the enormous vogue of *A Chinese Honeymoon*, a happy-go-lucky confection with no pretences at being anything else, which was produced at the old Strand Theatre on October 5, 1901. It enjoyed the remarkable run of 1,075 performances. The music was by Howard Talbot and the cast included Lily Elsie, Marie Dainton, Arthur Williams, Farren Soutar and Picton Roxborough. But what made the piece was the extraordinarily diverting performance of that quaint little comedienne Louie Freear who, among other ditties, so memorably sang :

I want to be a lidy and peroxide my hair.
I want it the colour it's the fashion now to wear.
I want it bright and golden, so that when I stroll each morn
The folks will stare and say "There's 'air!
She's a lidy bred and born."

Throughout the period mercurial Seymour Hicks was here, there and everywhere with breathless energy inventing, writing, producing and acting in musical comedies of his own particular entertaining kind with his lovely wife Ellaline Terriss as his leading lady. They included *Bluebell in Fairyland* (1902), *The Cherry Girl* (1903), *The Catch of the Season* (1904), *The Beauty of Bath* (1906), *The Gay Gordons* (1907) and *The Dashing Little Duke* (1909) with which he opened the Hicks (later Globe) Theatre.

A great deal of perturbation was caused when in 1906 Edna May, deeming her professional dignity to have been offended over some matter of billing, walked out of the cast of *The Belle of Mayfair* at the Vaudeville and sacrificed what was reputed to be the largest stage salary in London. Her place in the Leslie Stuart piece was

then taken by Phyllis Dare who made a delightful success of the role. It was in this production that Camille Clifford sang "Why do they call me a Gibson Girl?"

Producers were always seeking some novelty of setting and some fresh territory to exploit in the interests of picturesque setting. Thus one saw *Amasis* (ancient Egypt), *The Blue Moon* (Burma), *See See* (China), *The Belle of Brittany*, *A Persian Princess* (of which there remains an entrancing memory of George Graves as an ancient seer overweighted by a vast turban), *A Balkan Princess*, *Dear Little Denmark* and *Miss Hook of Holland*, the latter one of Paul Rubens's most pleasing inspirations.

When *The Earl and the Girl* was produced at the Adelphi in 1903 the greater part of the D'Oyly Carte company appeared to have deserted to musical comedy. The cast included Henry Lytton, Robert Evett, Walter Passmore, Agnes Fraser, Louie Pounds and Winifred Hart-Dyke. But, as one critic observed: "In the result it was very soon made manifest that a Savoy company does not necessarily mean a Savoy piece, and that with their transference from one side of the Strand to the other the old Savoyards here engaged had likewise crossed that line which separates comic opera, as it was understood by Sullivan and his successors, from its more frivolous and irresponsible outgrowth which rejoices in the title of musical comedy. Not the Savoy but the Gaiety represents the ideals which Messrs. Seymour Hicks and Ivan Caryll have had in view, and therefore it would be quite foolish to criticise their work for not having reached a mark which was plainly never aimed at."

As one looks back it is rather touching to recall how ready and sympathetic were the critics to welcome any sign of revolution or change in the conventions of musical comedy.

I remember the really serious note of approval of *The Stage* when, in *The Girl Behind the Counter* (Wyndham's, 1906), Isabel Jay expressed these right-minded sentiments unusual in a musical comedy heroine:

I want no scented extravagant dandy
Who brags of his vices and debts,
Dines every evening on coffee and brandy
And sups on perfumed cigarettes.
I must have a leader, a maker of history
One who intends to and can.
Courage and grit in him, honesty writ in him
I mean to marry a Man.

It was, perhaps, a somewhat excessive demand but it denoted a gratifying sign of a new standard of morality in musical comedy. Similarly the judicious approved when, in the same production, Hayden Coffin appeared as a gold miner returned from West Africa and delivered himself of this stern and manly refrain :

Work, work, work, never shirking
From the moment dawn begins.
You must try, try, try, for it's do or die
In the land where the best man wins.

There were few who did so much to raise the standard of taste in musical comedy as Robert Courtneidge who came to London from management in Manchester. He had been an actor and was something of an idealist as well as artiste, for he was associated with Robert Blatchford in running that once popular Socialist weekly *The Clarion*. A. M. Thompson, who wrote under the pen-name of "Dangle" in its breezy columns, was responsible for the "books" of his productions and they were invariably excellent.

Courtneidge not only introduced many new artistes to London—they included Dan Rolyat, Nelson Keys, Harry Welchman and Florence Smithson—but his standards of artistic presentation were exceptionally high. There have been few finer scenic artists than Conrad Tritschler who designed for so many of his productions.

His first production was *The Dairymaids* at the Apollo in 1906, a rollicking piece of nonsense with music by Paul Rubens and Frank Tours in which Carrie Moore sang "The Sadow Girl". It had Walter Passmore as one of its comedians but the great hit was made by Dan Rolyat, an acrobatic droll of quite a new kind who astonished first-nighters on that occasion with his extraordinary feats of tumbling and his versatility. He was hailed as a great discovery. Courtneidge subsequently produced *Tom Jones* which, with Edward German's music, was artistically pleasing and bracingly English though it did take unpardonable liberties with Fielding's full-blooded novel.

Courtneidge's outstanding triumph came when he produced *The Arcadians* at the Shaftesbury in 1909 for this delightful piece had features lifting it much above the customary plane of musical comedy, fantasy and a touch of real poetry being among them. It introduced playgoers to Arcadia where everybody was gentle and kind and truthful, and lying was unknown. Mark Ambient and A. M. Thompson invented a capital story in the adventure of Mr.

Smith, a vulgar caterer who, missing his way in his "flying machine", crashed into this happy realm, told a lie and was thereupon plunged into the Well of Truth. He emerged transformed and beautified in body and nature and thereupon departed with the sweet and trusting Arcadian girl Sombra on a mission to convert London. Thereafter a pretty story became rather vulgarised but that was somewhat atoned for by a wonderful scene realistically evoking the excitement of the Derby. It was a triumph of stage effect.

It was an evening of many successes. Lionel Monckton and Howard Talbot provided a delightful score. Not only was Phyllis Dare charming and Dan Rolyat amazing in his grotesqueries as Smith transformed into Simplicitas, but Alfred Lester in his most superbly lugubrious vein sang "I've gotter motter, always merry and bright" which became a popular catchword, and Florence Smithson was something of a sensation. As *The Times* critic wrote: "By far the most attractive figure in the piece is plaintive, earnest little Sombra, the real Arcadian. Miss Smithson hit the tone exactly. Never depressingly mournful she was always earnest, plaintive and trusting; and it was a pleasure to hear so pure and flute-like a voice used with such admirable distinction and art. Mr. Monckton and Mr. Howard Talbot both surpassed themselves in writing songs for her to sing, and she made the very most of their music. Next must come Mr. Alfred Lester as a jockey more hilariously melancholy than ever."

The Arcadians ran for two and a half years and, as it cost Courtneidge only £8,000 to put on, it must have shown a tidy profit. Artistes' salaries in those Arcadian days were quite modest. According to that knowing theatrical writer H. G. Hibbert, the principal salaries were: Dan Rolyat, £50 a week, Phyllis Dare, £45, Alfred Lester, £35, Florence Smithson, £30, Harry Welchman, £10 and Nelson Keys, £5. They were then, of course, comparatively unknown in the West End.

Well, it is very pleasant to look back on these musical plays of the past and to recall their enchanting melodies. For enchanting they undoubtedly were, whether in comic opera, operetta or plain, unabashed musical comedy. One need not be ashamed to acknowledge a taste for them in these days when tuneless dirge, brassy stridency, saxophones, muted trumpets, hideous thumpings, monotonous rhythms, the discordant, distorting microphone and such noxious importations, have taken their place.

It is not an exaggeration to say that these tuneful scores of the past did help considerably in the formation of musical taste among younger playgoers. In this view I am glad to have the support of that erudite and accomplished music critic Neville Cardus who, in *Second Innings*, writes so pleasantly about his memories of Edwardian musical comedy, the tunes of which, he asserts "had charm and art enough to awaken a child's sensibilities to music proper". And, he proceeds: "To take delight at a theatre alive and animated and full of colour, in the music of *Les Cloches de Corneville*, *La Poupée*, *Veronique*, *The Little Michus* and later the operettas of Fall, Oscar Straus and Lehar, was an attractive way of approach to the authentic masters, more likely to lead somewhere than the self-conscious appreciation classes of current middle-class fashion on the one hand and on the other the croonings of Bing Crosby which have taken the place of the popular music of Leslie Stuart . . ."

And one thinks of the lovely and gracious ladies who decorated musical comedy. They had an individuality and a style that the musical comedy girls of to-day utterly fail to approach. Where is there an equal to Gertie Millar? Where is there one who has the grace and beauty and accomplishment of Ellaline Terriss, of Marie Studholme, of Lily Elsie? Or one who can display the fun and frolic of a Gracie Leigh, a Katie Seymour or a Louie Freear? No, they are not to be found now that the old style musical comedy is dead.

And where can you find such handsome and attractive singers as Hayden Coffin, Robert Evett, Lionel Mackinder, Bertram Wallis, Leonard Mackay, Robert Michaelis and Maurice Farkoa?

Maurice Farkoa! He was an enchanting artiste who invariably appeared as a fascinating Frenchman in musical comedy but actually he was born in Smyrna—hence the romantic accent which gave such piquancy to his singing. With his handsome looks, the white forelock to his coal-black hair and his quick, expressive gestures, he was the ideal *chansonnier*. Whatever role he played, even when in *See See* he appeared as a Chinese sprig of aristocracy, he insisted on wearing his luxuriant black moustache. As a pigtailed Chinese it made him look absurd but no one minded that for he was always graceful, charming, melodious.

In those days musical comedy was exceptionally rich in its comedians and how good they were. One's favourite was always Edmund Payne, but Huntley Wright—a comedian whose rather forced style, I must admit, never appealed to me—ran him very

close in popularity. And there was, of course, the droll and acrobatic Dan Rolyat, the dry, precise Lauri de Frece and such brisk and entertaining little fellows as Walter Passmore and Horace Mills.

How admirable was W. H. Berry with his bland presence, his beaming smile, his upturned quiff like the crest of a cockatoo and his rich and genial humour. No one could give such point to a topical song, unless it was Rutland Barrington whose curious privilege it always seemed to be to appear as a much-married man with a string of young and attractive wives.

From *Veronique* onwards George Graves was a constant joy. His parts as testy, amorous and eccentric old gentlemen tended to grow in richness and volubility as the play's run extended. He added to them with ingenious gag and improvisation and his soliloquies and dissertations, his wise saws and modern instances uttered in that strange foggy voice so redolent in the argot of the club smoking-room and the Turf and emphasised by his quaint gestures, expressed volumes of comic philosophy.

And there were those endearing dude comedians, too, the representatives of entertaining asininity, the well-bred, exquisitely dressed men-about-town such as George Grossmith and G. P. Huntley. The monocled Huntley, who had once acted with the Kendals, was a positive genius in amiable foolery, good-natured idiocy and simple-mindedness, expressed in the plummy accents of the public school.

In those happy, far-off days touring companies flourished and London's musical comedy successes were soon on the road duplicating the West End productions in every detail. Number One companies which visited such important cities as Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and Leeds were in most respects just as lavishly equipped as the parent production. It was the frequent custom in Manchester to have a Christmas season of the latest Gaiety or Daly's show and to withdraw temporarily one or two of the principals. But so great were the resources of the profession that it was possible to duplicate almost exactly many of the London stars and in many cases they were preferred by Northern audiences. Thus Manchester had a great favourite in George Gregory who played Edmund Payne parts. He had a broader and cruder style than Payne but he had a much greater appeal to Mancunians.

Eric Thorne was almost an exact double of George Graves and he also played many Willie Edouin parts, as did that capital comedian

Fred Eastman. W. H. Berry had a very able substitute in W. H. Rawlins, Bertie Wright played many of his brother Huntley's parts and Leslie Holland was capital in G. P. Huntley and George Grossmith roles. And even that well-nigh inimitable patterer Arthur Roberts, unsurpassed in raffish roles found his double in a comedian named Danby.

For me—and I expect for a great many other old playgoers—one of the unforgettable joys of the past was the Follies—a troupe of entertainers the like of which, more's the pity, is quite unknown to the present generation. I am deeply sorry for those who were born too late to see them. Not to have seen the Follies is to have missed one of the most exquisite forms of light entertainment ever devised.

There is nothing in these times to which I can compare it. It had all the attributes of real revue in its most refined and witty form—yet it was not like revue as we know it now. Compared with what the Follies provided the best of modern intimate revue has been a coarse and clumsy over-elaborated thing. All that the Follies did under the lead of their incomparable chief, H. G. Pelissier, was sheer delight. They were a recognised stage institution almost throughout the Edwardian reign. They were the licensed jesters of the time and their entertainment was unique.

Actually, I suppose, the Follies were a concert party in Pierrot dress. Such, at least, was their origin, and though their entertainment developed in scope it happily never grew out of that form nor allowed you to believe that it was anything more than a happy band of artistes who relied upon improvisation and with the air of accomplished amateurs who took just as much enjoyment in what they did as did their audience.

The Follies had their origin in a seaside troupe formed in 1895 by Sherrington Chinn. Youthful Harry Pelissier, son of a dealer in precious stones and a clever singer, composer and pianist, was one of the original band. A year later he acquired control of the party and introduced burlesque as a feature of the entertainment. He introduced skits on grand opera, wordless plays and musical comedy, all with a mere suggestion of scenery and costume. Whatever guises the Follies assumed they always retained the essential parts of their Pierrot dress.

They did the rounds of the seaside until 1904 when they were introduced as a turn in the variety bill at the Palace Theatre. Part of their contribution was a delicious burlesque of Christmas

pantomime. Later on, with a company of only six performers, they guyed *Hamlet*, a topical idea for, about that time, several actor-managers had staged the play. There may have been better Hamlets than Pelissier (who by this time had attained a pleasing rotundity) but none as funny as he.

In 1904 the company consisted of Pelissier, the doleful visaged Lewis Sydney who was a superb *raconteur*, Dan Everard who was extremely versatile and Gwennie Mars, Marjorie Napier, and Ethel Allendale, all very charming. Later on Morris Harvey (a remarkably good mimic), Douglas Maclaren (a light juvenile), Effie Cook and Muriel George were added and that (except for the retirement of Marjorie Napier) was the composition of the troupe at the height of its success.

The Follies gave their first full-length entertainment during a Christmas season at Manchester in 1906. In 1907 they had a London season at the Royalty Theatre and in later years there were other seasons, culminating at the Apollo where they became a recognised institution.

I would like to go over all they did during those memorable nights so fraught with laughter and delight at the Apollo but the task is quite beyond me. I saw practically every programme and each was a joy. Pelissier was a wit and a humorist but what is more he was the cause of wit and humour in others, inspiring all his company with his magnificent sense of burlesque and absurdity. He had the perfect accomplishment of the perfect *compère*. He would coax, cajole and bully his company. He would make mock of his own and their efforts. He could improvise on the instant—at least so it always seemed. He composed delightful songs and he was wittily aided by Arthur Wimperis who wrote a good deal of the Follies' material.

The Follies shot at current fads and follies. They had no respect for anything or anybody. They guyed respected institutions unmercifully. They burlesqued everything from opera, cantata and the Queen's Hall Orchestra to the "voice trial" and twice-nightly variety. Can one ever forget the Follies' music-hall with its ridiculous take-off of familiar turns—red-nosed comedians, Dickens impersonators, sharp-shooting acts and sister duettists, all to the accompaniment of rude interruptions from the gallery? All this came within the resources of nine performers.

And there was the Follies' historical pageant. This was at the period when all England was pageant-mad. So the Follies produced

their own and how superb that was. During the inevitable parade of the kings and queens of England there was the equally inevitable downpour of rain in which the splendid background of turreted castle was washed away to disclose the stark and hideous form of the local gasworks. It was grand.

But perhaps best of all were the "potted plays" burlesquing current stage successes. In this line they never did better than in their conceptions of *The Merry Widow* and the Drury Lane melodrama *The Whip*. Pelissier as a huntswoman with a pack of stuffed hounds is a magnificent memory.

Some of the Follies had had stage experience before they joined the company; others came almost as amateurs. Yet the astonishing thing is that they exhibited brilliance at once—such was the spirit which Pelissier infused into his merry band of performers. Most of them naturally had talent but it was he who inspired them into something more. The Follies never carried mere "passengers"; each Folly contributed his or her worthy share. Yet without Pelissier it would have been just a very capable concert party. With him it was the most talented and delightful assembly of players in London. There has been nothing like it since those happy days.

XXI

MELODRAMA AND PANTOMIME

M ELODRAMA AND PANTOMIME MAY STRIKE THE READER AS an odd conjunction but there is good reason for grouping together these apparently disparate forms of entertainment. For in the days when melodrama still held the field as a popular stage attraction it was invariably to be found at those theatres which were associated with the production of pantomime.

This was so during the first decade of the century, mainly at Drury Lane but also at such theatres outside the magic circle of the West End as the Grand at Islington, the Elephant and Castle Theatre, the Standard at Shoreditch, the Surrey Theatre, the Pavilion, Mile End and the Royal West London, just off the Edgware Road.

At all these houses pantomime on a more or less elaborate scale was always the Christmas attraction; the rest of the year was devoted to melodrama. That became the custom, too, at the Lyceum, following a brief post-Irving spell during which it was a music-hall.

Melodrama was maintained for many years at Drury Lane and it was practically the last house at which it was produced on the heroic super-scale. The old Princess's Theatre in Oxford Street closed its doors for ever in 1903. There one saw such touching dramas as *Two Little Vagabonds* and *The Midnight Wedding* but they were not done with the marvellous stage effects seen at Drury Lane. No other theatre had such wonderful mechanical resources. Melodrama lingered elsewhere in London and in the provinces long after it was abandoned at "the Lane" but in a much cruder and less elaborate form. Its death knell was sounded in the rise of the cinema. It was hardly possible to compete against the more convincing realism of the screen.

The chief attraction of melodrama, particularly at Drury Lane, was the sensational scenes which reproduced with more or less realism such thrilling events as shipwrecks, train smashes, earthquakes or various aspects of warfare and such other disasters as afflict mankind. Scenes like these were enjoyed with great delight

even by sophisticated audiences at "the Lane" and on a smaller scale they thrilled multitudes at the suburban houses. Nowadays melodrama has been replaced in the provinces by companies touring cheap revue and I am not so sure that that is much of an improvement. Melodrama with all its *naïveté* and crudity did at least impart a wholesome moral. Virtue was always exalted and Vice was always suitably punished before the curtain fell.

Melodrama with its stock types of character was highly conventionalised in form. There was always a much persecuted hero and heroine who were invariably fair (and thus easily recognisable), a villain and villainess who were of darker complexion, morally and physically, and there was always a good supply of "comic relief".

Even at Drury Lane under Arthur Collins and where Cecil Raleigh was a master-hand in devising highly sensational entertainment in which he managed to introduce scenes of topical interest, these conventions were generally observed. Drury Lane audiences were not too critical about the literary quality of the melodrama provided the action was vigorous and cumulative in interest and that in at least one act there was a sensational scene. Yet, considering what conditions were imposed upon the author, these productions were not despicable. They did provide excitement and the moral lesson imparted was always unimpeachable.

It is all very well to sneer at them but it must be remembered that Drury Lane with its vast space was a difficult house to cope with. Broad effects were necessary in that great gilded barn in which subtlety and delicacy would have been lost. The main appeal had to be spectacular and visual. The scene-painter and the stage mechanists were just as important as the dramatist. Spectacular drama required a particular method of acting. Drawing-room elocution would have been of little use on the great stage. What was required was force and intensity, the use of the big brush. The actor could not be psychologically profound. Everything had to be much larger than life. As E. A. Baughan remarked on one occasion, "Drury Lane plays are a thing apart. Emotion has to be trebly underlined and the producer must be allowed to lavish all that is possible with scenic art."

In these circumstances it is remarkable how well Arthur Collins, Drury Lane's producer and manager, cast his plays with actors and actresses capable of fulfilling all such difficult requirements. His melodramas were never stinted in the casting. The list of artistes

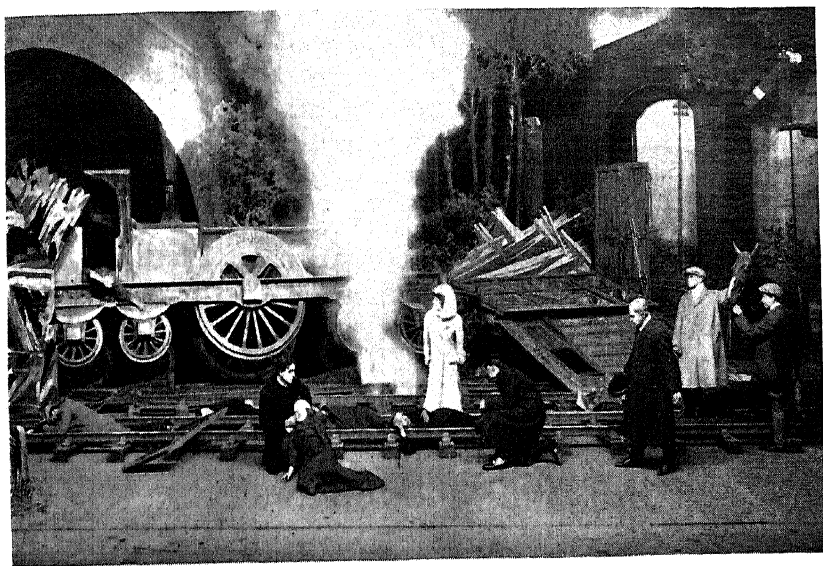
who were engaged in his annual productions was notable in big names.

As an example of the sort of thing that was seen at Drury Lane let me say something about *The Flood Tide*, staged in 1903. Its author, Cecil Raleigh, described it as a "melo-farce" and that was something of a novelty. Actually it was only a new description for the familiar melodrama.

The principal character (played by that fine old actor J. H. Barnes) was a sturdy publican struggling to provide his son, who had risen from the ranks, with the means of living as an officer and a gentleman. Dick Champion (such was his name) was a type of all that makes England what she is. His manly sentiments and emotions were highly moving and the pathos of the scene in which he discovered that his son had been taunted by his brother officers about his humble birth was just the kind of thing that moved Drury Lane audiences to transports of admiration.

The plot was wonderful in its ingenuity. There was a wicked Baroness in search of wealth and dragging her occasionally remorseful daughter into the path of crime. There was a diamond millionaire who, one reads, danced about with a loaded revolver, having drunk himself into delirium tremens. There was the publican's heroic son and a lively daughter named Polly whose vulgarity was merely a manifestation of her innate goodness. There was a comic young man named Clipp who met with many exciting adventures by land and water. There was an Earl of the very basest type who wished to drive the hero out of his regiment, and he exhibited all the vices of the aristocrat officer (at least as Cecil Raleigh imagined him). There was also an Italian prepared for murder. Brought together these people behaved sometimes as might be expected but more frequently in a way which was entertaining because of its sheer absurdity.

The Baroness and her daughter seized upon the millionaire's name and luggage, he having gone overboard on the way from South America to England. At Brighton they encountered Clipp and Polly who were masquerading as the same millionaire and his secretary. Later on the millionaire turned up and while Polly and her father sent him up North to get him out of the way the Baroness persuaded the Italian hireling to attempt to put an end to him. Before this happened there was a scene at Kempton Park where the winning of a race was the means by which the publican hoped to get out of his financial difficulties. The race was won in a



Train wreck scene in *The Whip*, Drury Lane Theatre, 1909.



The poster that advertised *The Bad Girl of the Family*, Aldwych Theatre, 1909.



CARRIE MOORE in *Cinderella*, Adelphi Theatre, 1908.



HERBERT CAMPBELL and DAN LENO in Drury Lane pantomime.

manner which led to a public protest by the wicked Earl who, for one so vile, was strangely in the right. However Clipp was the only sufferer for he was seized and ducked as a welsher.

Elsewhere on the banks of a lake on a stormy night the millionaire was fishing when the Italian arrived intending to do him deadly ill. Clipp managed to get there first and the whole trio were swept away by a flood. The millionaire, however, returned to his own and was accepted by the Baroness's daughter who had left her mother in disgust. The hero married his colonel's daughter without any difficulty except that he had placed her in a compromising situation which predisposed her father in his favour, and the boat train moved out of Victoria Station in a triumphant finale.

"Nothing quite like all this has been seen on our stage for some time," wrote the *Westminster Gazette* critic of these remarkable happenings, "and in ludicrous irresponsibility the last scene on the station platform could only with very great difficulty be equalled. I never knew Mr. Raleigh could do anything half as funny."

The singular characters of this extraordinary invention were quite impressively acted by J. H. Barnes, by Weedon Grossmith as Clipp, C. W. Somerset as the mad millionaire, Mrs. Tree as the Baroness, Margaret Halstan as her daughter and by Claire Romaine as Polly and the most sensational scene was that in which a lake of real water covered the entire stage.

How curious it is, by the way, that such touches of realism always deeply impressed the audience. No one in those days would have walked across the street to look at a hansom cab nor have given a second glance at a railway engine. Yet it required only the introduction of such things on the stage of Drury Lane to ensure the success of the melodrama.

One recalls other remarkable happenings at that theatre. In *The Great Millionaire* (1901) there was a sensational motor-car race and realistic representations of the Guildhall and the Carlton Hotel. *The Best of Friends* (1902) was written round the then just concluded Boer War and, with imposing military scenes, breathed the healing spirit of mutual admiration between late enemies. *The Sins of Society* (1908) had magnificent stage pictures illustrating pleasure and crime in High Society and introduced such exciting scenes as a replica of the *Birkenhead* disaster, a view of a Thames weir by moonlight and the glitter and fashion of a Longchamp race meeting. The sinking of the ship with its orderly discipline and soldiers singing the National Anthem as they awaited death was really impressive.

The Marriages of Mayfair (1908) epitomised many recent events and topical matters. Authors Cecil Raleigh and Henry Hamilton, inspired by the Druce case, composed a plot about a disputed title, and this ingeniously allowed for the introduction of a scene depicting the theft of the Crown jewels from the Tower of London, and in another scene there was an Alpine avalanche.

One of the best of all Drury Lane melodramas and one of its most successful productions was *The Whip* (1909), the play which provided the Follies (against whom at one time Drury Lane threatened an injunction) with one of their cleverest "potted plays". This highly imaginative composition about sporting life introduced, among other things, a real pack of hounds in their kennels and a whole set of racehorses with their jockeys. There was an amusing interlude in the Chamber of Horrors at Mme. Tussaud's, and the big sensation was a railway collision brought about by the villain in order to secure the destruction of the racehorse that gave the title to the play.

There was a brief interval during which Drury Lane attempted to raise the standard by staging Hall Caine's *The Bondman* and *The Prodigal Son*. But notwithstanding the then considerable literary eminence of Hall Caine and the engagement of such artistes as George Alexander, Henry Ainley, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, Henry Neville and Lionel Brough, it is doubtful whether they were to be classed as anything much higher than the more crudely sensational works of Cecil Raleigh. At all events they depended a great deal upon the customary spectacular attractions. For instance, in *The Bondman* the stage was crowded with a herd of live and well-trained cattle and there was a representation of a sulphur mine in Sicily—"more lifelike", as one critic observed, "than the characters which appear in it".

It should be said in fairness to the scene-painters and mechanists of Drury Lane that photographs of the stage settings of the big sensational scenes have never done justice to their effect of illusion. The camera, flattening the perspective, suggests the obvious artificiality of paint and canvas, whereas with the aid of stage lighting and the *optique du théâtre* the effect was one of reality sufficient to impress the then less sophisticated public. However the cinema came along and that spelt the ultimate doom of sensational thrills.

Melodrama's other stronghold in the West End was for many years at the Lyceum Theatre. Here it depended for its thrills upon

romantic heroisms, simple sentiment and general swashbucklery, rather than upon mechanical sensation. After the brief interval during which it tried unsuccessfully to become a music-hall it was taken over in March 1907 by Ernest Carpenter, a provincial manager who in partnership with H. R. Smith introduced a policy of melodrama. He began with *Her Love Against the World*, "a stirring romantic play" as it was billed, by that prolific author Walter Howard who knew exactly what the *hoi polloi* liked in the way of sensationalism, broad humour and exciting heroics. The play had a Ruritanian setting, as did several of its successors, and Norah Kerin was the heroine. It was just the strong type of stuff to fill the theatre and so, once again, the Lyceum became the home of drama.

There were those intervals already referred to in which Matheson Lang and Nora Kerin were seen in Shakesperean revivals, broadened enough to suit the popular taste, and in revivals of *The Christian* and *The Bondman*, and later productions included such rousing pieces as *The Midnight Wedding* and *The Prince and the Beggar Maid*.

Ernest Carpenter died in December 1909. Then the theatre was taken over by Walter and Frederick Melville who had been running the Standard at Shoreditch. So, with *The Fighting Chance* and a revival of *The Midnight Wedding* began the long and successful régime of melodrama and pantomime that made the Lyceum famous and prosperous again, and it did not end until shortly before the Second World War.

Elsewhere melodrama flourished exceedingly at theatres of inner suburbia, some of which, as at the Grand, Islington, the Standard and the West London, staged their own productions. Touring companies were innumerable. I remember that within the Manchester area there were at least half a dozen houses devoted to that sort of thing and they all did well.

The scope and themes of them can be judged by some of their lurid titles which chiefly emphasised the frailties and perils of womanhood. As, for instance, *What Women Worship*, *A False Wife*, *The Vengeance of Woman*, *The Worst Woman in the World*, *The Worst of all Women*, *The Bad Girl of the Family*, *A Woman's Devotion*, *The Father of Her Child* and *A Girl's Cross Roads*.

This kind of drama is dead now but its spirit lives on in the Hollywood film and it would be hard to say whether the standard of taste and intelligence which they exhibit is much of an improvement upon anything once seen in Melvillian and Howardian melodrama, with their lurid villains, their bold bad vamps and

adventuresses, their incredibly wronged heroines and their noble heroes.

★ ★ ★

As long as King Panto was annually enthroned at Drury Lane one felt that the foundations of our national Christmas institution were firmly laid. Arthur Collins had carried on the long-established custom and had excelled the spectacular splendours of Sir Augustus Harris though he reduced the long and wearisome pageantry—the interminable “Processions of All Nations”, processions of the Kings and Queens of England, of Shakesperean characters, of what-not—which had been his ruling passion. One grudge I cherish against Collins, a producer of remarkable talent, and that is that he reduced the Harlequinade to practically nothing. But otherwise, with full recognition of what subsequent pantomime “kings” have achieved, I consider that no one has ever excelled the delight of his Christmas shows, and that pantomime under his régime attained its topmost peak of glory. His productions did vouchsafe much of Fairyland and are indeed something to remember.

Collins had had the great advantage of continuing the engagement of the most notable partnership that pantomime ever produced, that of Dan Leno and Herbert Campbell. They were twin souls of absurdity and merriment, the one—the most diverting of all dames—diminutive, impish, wistful, urgent, electrical and vital; the other big, lethargic, solemn and good-natured. Leno, of course, was a genius of humour, the other no more than an able comedian. But each provided the perfect foil.

For many years the partnership had given the greatest delight to Drury Lane pantomime, but after *Bluebeard* (1901) Leno's health was giving cause for anxiety to his admirers. Ever since he had appeared before King Edward, who had presented him with a diamond pin, he had been known as “the King's Jester”. The honour seemed to turn the little man's head and he became notably eccentric. Among other oddities he would scatter cheques for millions of pounds with a regal generosity. He had a breakdown in 1902 but was able to appear at Drury Lane that Christmas in *Mother Goose*. His manner appeared less exuberant than usual yet the part was one of his best performances and who will forget him as a harpist enmeshed in the strings of his cumbrous instrument or as the marvellously transformed creature who emerged from the Magic Pool? That pantomime was notable for its tasteful *art*

nouveau decorations, a wonderful spectacle of bronzes, porcelains and enamels. When it ended Leno again became irrational and during the summer he was confined to a private mental home.

But there was a strange vitality and a dominant will in that frail body and despite all fears he was able to fulfil his engagement in *Humpty Dumpty* at Christmas. It was after a prolonged absence from the public that he appeared on Boxing Night 1903. He had a tumultuous reception. The audience nearly raised the roof with delight at once again seeing that whimsical face with the high arched eyebrows. "He was, if not continuously, at any rate at every critical juncture, his old and best self," said *The Times*. "Of two things one: either his illness must have been exaggerated in the public prints or it must be of such a nature as only very slightly to affect the aptitude for the grotesque required of pantomime drolls."

Once again Dan Leno was Queen to the King of Herbert Campbell and he had a delicious scene with Harry Randall as the royal cook in which he raised grave questions as to the fate of the provisions alleged to have been consumed by the royal cat. There was another interlude under the Tree of Truth in which fruit dropped on the head of whatever creature sat under its shade and told a lie. "Mr. Leno", wrote the *Westminster Gazette*, "is irresistibly funny; and even in his less happy moments he stands many heads and shoulders above anybody else doing this class of work. He and Drury Lane are to be congratulated upon his recovery, for his absence would have made a considerable difference."

It is sad to remember that in *Humpty Dumpty* Leno and Campbell sang in the finale: "And we hope to appear, For many a year, In the panto of old Drury Lane." For it was to be their last pantomime. Campbell died after an accident in July, 1904 and Dan Leno, grief for his old friend and partner aggravating his ailment, followed him in the autumn.

Faced with the loss of these superb comedians, the prop of pantomime for so many years, Arthur Collins took extra pains to secure a strong cast for *The White Cat* in 1904. His company, strong in comedians, included Queenie Leighton, Marie George, Harry Randall (as the Fairy Asbestos), Fred Eastman, Hugh Ward, Tom Wootwell, Ruth Lytton, Tom Hearne and James Welch. Yet it proved to be one of the most unfortunate productions in the history of Drury Lane.

A scathing attack on the music-hall artistes appearing in

pantomime had appeared in an obscure journal and it was hinted that Drury Lane should engage such an artiste as James Welch who had never acted in pantomime. The hint was taken but this excellent comedian whose art was of the most delicate kind did not fit into his new medium. But that was not all. Though other newspapers praised the pantomime the *Daily Mail* went out of its way to attack it in a leader as well as on its news pages as "unfit for children".

They engaged Mr. H. E. Cooper, a well-known writer for juveniles, and he held forth righteously in a long article in which he complained that the dialogue was neither refined nor amusing, that it was for the great part unfit for young ears and that it had the vulgarity of the French music-hall without its wit. Much capital was made out of the fact that poor Mr. Welch sang a song entitled "A square peg in a round hole" which, it was suggested, applied to his appearance in pantomime.

The campaign, in which no other paper thought fit to join, had a disastrous effect upon the box-office. Thoughtful papas and kind uncles kept their children away from Drury Lane that season. Welch very soon left the cast but the damage had already been done. Business languished and the theatre was half-filled. Matinee performances were soon abandoned. *The White Cat*, in short, was a flop.

There are happier memories about subsequent pantomimes. Boxing Night 1906 saw a charming version of *Cinderella* (with May de Sousa as principal girl) of which *The Stage* remarked that it appealed first and foremost to the youngsters and that no one could rise up in more or less righteous indignation and say that anything in it was outside the comprehension of the juvenile intellect. "Perhaps the most distinguishing feature", it said, "is the manner in which the tale has been adhered to and its details have been elaborated to make the pantomime without leaving it to the comedians to pad out with their individual scenes."

This was the pantomime in which that Anglo-French comedian Harry Fragson was introduced as a French Dandigny and old Savoyard Walter Passmore was the Baroness de Bluff.

My pleasantest memory of *Sinbad the Sailor* (1906) is of the introduction of a scene between Harry Randall and Fred Emney which became enormously popular and survived the pantomime for many years in the music-hall sketch "A Sister to Assist 'er". It was an interlude in which, as two old women, the comedians sat and scandalised their neighbours over a cup of tea with some-

thing stronger in it and ended up in a quarrel in which they called each other by every term of inventive abuse they could lay their tongues to. Many people would come late just in order to see that famous scene.

In *Dick Whittington* (1908) that admirable comedian Wilkie Bard who had a quiet cogitative manner introduced his famous tongue-twister "She sells sea-shells on the sea-shore" and was a great success. A. B. Walkley described him as "the Charles Lamb of the stage".

George Graves joined him in *Aladdin* in 1909 and that is a joyous memory, for Graves was in his element as Abanazar, a knowing old bird and a grotesque figure of shabby elegance or faded gentility.

Arthur Collins introduced far more humour into his productions than did Sir Augustus Harris and he was always lavish in his casting. And there was always a touch of taste in his spectacular scenes. As the *Westminster Gazette* critic remarked on one occasion "Mr. Collins and his assistants have come nearest to a real solution of the problem how to make use most judiciously of boundless resources in face of unlimited supply; and the effect is extremely beautiful, though one can well imagine a higher beauty which would not flaunt itself in such floods of glaring light. But it is a convention that everything must blaze and conventions must be obeyed, so everything blazes with a vengeance."

So far as pantomime was concerned Drury Lane for many years had no serious rival to contend with in the West End. Covent Garden had abandoned the old Christmas custom years before the century began and it was not until 1907, when the Lyceum had been acquired by Ernest Carpenter, that a rival became established. Carpenter died before the production of his third pantomime in 1909 and after that Frederick and Walter Melville carried on a tradition that was to endure with great success until almost the eve of the Second World War and long after pantomime had ceased to be at Drury Lane.

There were near rivals to Drury Lane, however, outside the West End circle, for pantomime on quite a lavish scale was always the thing at the Grand, Islington, the Standard Shoreditch, the Surrey in Blackfriars Road and, until 1906, the Britannia, Hoxton, which had long been famous for the fact that its Christmas productions were always written round an original story, instead of one of the conventional fairy-tales. Its last productions of that

kind were *King Doo-Dah* (1900), *Hanky-Panky, or the Golden Talisman* (1901), *King Krokod* (1902), *The Goblin of the Sea* (1904), and *King Wow-Wow* (1905). The end of real old-fashioned pantomime with its acrobatic pursuits, its star-traps and its Harlequinades, was a sad break in a long-established tradition that had made the "old Brit" a recognised place of pilgrimage at Christmas time.

Pantomime flourished mightily in the outer suburbs, attaining a peak year in 1901 when there were thirty-four different productions. As for the provinces there was hardly a period during which it was so popular. Although Drury Lane held the palm for elaborate and expensive productions it must by no means be assumed that the best pantomimes were to be seen only in London. They may have been on a bigger and more extravagant scale but some of the productions to be seen in such cities as Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Bristol, Edinburgh and Glasgow were not to be excelled in taste and in the quality of the stars who appeared in them. There were many artistes—among them George Robey, Ada Reeve, Marie Lloyd and Vesta Tilley—who invariably appeared in provincial shows and at what were then regarded as fantastic salaries.

In those days provincial pantomimes had not fallen into mass production. They were home-made and were, I feel bound to admit, all the better for it. They were the product of such resident proprietors and managers as J. M. Chute in Bristol, Philip Rodway in Birmingham, John Hart in Manchester and Howard and Wyndham in Glasgow and Edinburgh and, with "books", scenery and music by local artistes, were of exceptional taste and charm.

Wherever you saw it, Edwardian pantomime had a flavour of its own not to be detected in these days. Pantomime, I rejoice to think, persists with undiminished popularity but it is not the same hearty and breezy thing that it was. Some vigour and heartiness—well, healthy vulgarity if you like—has gone out of it because, I suppose, of the eclipse of the music-hall which was the nursery ground for the great comics who supplied its comedians, and of the serio-comics and burlesque artistes who provided the stalwart principal boys who could rouse the audience with lusty song and dazzle it with imposing presence. Where are the pantomime songs of yester year, those wonderful lays so popular, so singable, so whistleable in Edwardian days? Alas, they too, have vanished with the rose, with the music-hall, with so many other things that gave colour to the Edwardian scene.

XXII

L'ENVOI

KING EDWARD DIED ON MAY 6, 1910 AND SO CAME TO AN END a period rich in achievement and, for the theatre-goer, one that cannot be recalled without a glow of sentimental feeling. It will always be associated with the names of some of the greatest personalities of the English theatre, with those who gave new splendour and distinction to the art of acting and increased the dignity of their calling. It will be associated, too, with those who did so much to raise the prestige of the dramatist with works of a literary merit so much in advance of the standard during the later part of the old century.

During Edward's brief reign a new breath of life had come into the theatre and developments destined to affect its future were experienced. Yet it is not because of these things that the old playgoer looks back upon the scene with such wistful regrets. Not for him the feeling of pride in movements and tendencies and intellectual advancement but the thought that the players who gave such pleasure in those nights of long ago have mostly vanished and are not to be replaced in affections by newcomers of whatever talent. I have done my best to recall many of them, though quite conscious of an inability to do justice to their unique qualities and personalities or to present them as they really were. But who *is* capable of so doing?

Whatever advance was made during the years which I have dealt with was slow and subtle. The changes were not violent or revolutionary and it is conceivable that the ordinary average playgoer who looked to the theatre mainly for entertainment and recreation was quite unaware of the progress that was being made. Looking back on the theatrical year at the end of 1910 E. A. Baughan wrote somewhat pessimistically: "Light comedy, romantic melodrama and musical comedy have made the real successes of the year. Our fashionable theatres have become more and more a place of entertainment and in many cases they are simply withdrawing rooms for the fashionable restaurants. . . . The fact that Beerbohm Tree made a great success of his Shakespeare Festival in the spring and has since filled His Majesty's with the production of *Henry VIII*,

the most wonderful spectacle ever put on the English stage, does not really affect the situation. *Henry VIII* is an illustrated edition of Shakespeare."

But he added: "The critic of experience while deploring the fact that there are not three theatres in London where the drama is held to be the great art of human expression—which in truth it is—must admit that the general level of drama has risen and is rising. This is particularly to be noted in our comedies and in the type of play which is neither a comedy nor a tragedy but something of both."

So there from a pessimist was an admission that progress had indeed been made.

I began this account of a notable theatrical era with a picture of the London stage as it was when Edward came to the throne. Let me close it with the programme of what the playgoer could see in the last days of the reign, with the reminder that as the summer season was approaching lighter entertainment prevailed.

At the St. James's Theatre there was a revival of *The Importance of Being Earnest* with George Alexander and Allan Aynesworth in their original roles. Fred Terry and Julia Neilson were at the New in *The Scarlet Pimpernel*.

At the Queen's H. B. Irving and Dorothea Baird were to be seen in *Louis XI* and *Hamlet*. Charles Hawtrey was appearing at Wyndham's in *The Naked Truth*; James Welch was at the Criterion in *When Knights Were Bold*; Ethel Irving was in *Dame Nature* at the Garrick. Charles Frohman's repertory company was presenting *Trelawny of the Wells*, *Helena's Path* (Hope and Lennox) and Barrie's *The Twelve Pound Look* at the Duke of York's. At the Globe there was *Parasites*, an adaptation of the French play *La Rabouilleuse*.

Gerald du Maurier was appearing at the Comedy in *Alias Jimmy Valentine*; Cyril Maude and Marie Löhr were in *Tantalising Tommy* at the Playhouse, with matinee performances of *The Toymaker of Nuremberg*. Lewis Waller was to be seen at the Lyric in *The Rivals*; *The House of Temperley*, by Conan Doyle, was at the Adelphi, and at the Haymarket there was Maeterlinck's exquisite fantasy, *The Blue Bird*.

The Whip, with an imposing cast, was exciting multitudes at Drury Lane, and at the Lyceum there was a revival of *The Prince and the Beggar Maid*.

Naturally at this time of the year musical entertainment flourished. The Beecham Opera Company occupied His Majesty's. *The*

Arcadians at the Shaftesbury, *Our Miss Gibbs* at the Gaiety and *The Dollar Princess* at Daly's were going strong. *A Balkan Princess* was at the Prince of Wales's, *The Islanders* was at the Apollo and *The Merry Monarchs* at the Strand, while at the Savoy there was a production of Gluck's *Orpheus* with Marie Brema as Orpheus and Viola Tree as Eurydice.

Gaby Deslys, who had become a rage, was at the Alhambra, and at the Empire was to be seen Lydia Kyasht (who had succeeded adorable Adeline Genée), and Pavlova was at the Palace. To the supreme artistry of these dancers and to the following which they attracted we can trace the origin of the renaissance of our British ballet.

INDEX

In a book of this kind it is necessary to mention a vast number of names, many of them only by passing reference. It would be exhausting and not very helpful to the reader to record them all in an index. I have therefore thought it sufficient to confine the entries mainly to the names of those about whom something specific is recorded. In other instances a frequent mention alone may be held to justify their inclusion.—AUTHOR.

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